Pudeur, Place, and Print: Modesty, Agency, and Collaboration in Sixteenth-Century French Women's Writing



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***Pudeur*, Place, and Print: Modesty, Agency, and Collaboration in Sixteenth-Century French Women's Writing**

Nupur Patel, Lincoln College
Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Short Abstract

This thesis considers responses to modesty in the works of four sixteenth-century French women writers who work with and reclaim modesty in different ways. I focus on Marguerite de Navarre, the Dames des Roches, and Gabrielle de Coignard who span the sixteenth century and operate in different locations: Nérac, Poitiers, and Toulouse. Firstly, I examine how far their works reflect discourses of modesty in circulation, and whether these responses are shaped by the locations, physical and thematic, in which they live. Occasionally tracking *(im)pudeur* and cognate terms, this exploration mainly offers textual commentaries on these key terms: virginity, chastity, desire, sex, the female body, nudity, shame, and silence. I document how the importance of modesty changes over time and the shifts or movement between locations in the production and circulation of texts, from salon-type structures to printed works. The process becomes more complex when considering common associations between print and sexual deviance which compromised a woman's modesty. A second aspect of this thesis explores a creative response to this nexus, which I term 'collaborative modesty': networks of male and female collaborators that influence the composition, publication, and reception of women writers' texts. Alongside the intervention of male figures, a striking mother-daughter relationship emerges; daughters play a vital role in how their mothers are received in print, contemporarily and retrospectively. This thesis reconsiders understandings of early modern French women writers as 'submissive' or 'subversive', by focusing on the agency that they achieve within the confines of society.

Secondly, it offers a new concept of collaboration which dispels the myth of ‘male genius’ that for too long defined understandings of authorship. Literary collaboration is translocational and transactional; it does not simply consist of poets and writers. ‘Modest’ figures such as daughters, printers, and editors, all play an important role in literary creation.

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Long Abstract

This thesis considers the constraints, the force, and the freedoms of modesty in the works of four sixteenth-century French women writers: Marguerite de Navarre, Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, and Gabrielle de Coignard. It follows the transition from manuscript to print and pays particular attention to theatre and poetry that respond to modesty by way of various themes that relate to the concept. Modesty functions as a fundamental quality that women in this period had to uphold, and this thesis questions whether my chosen women writers abide by the dictates of *pudeur* in circulation and how far their literary responses to this key concept are shaped by genre and locations. These responses become more intriguing in light of the connection between printing and promiscuity, which compromised a woman writer's reputation to varying degrees across the century. A second feature of this thesis explores this dilemma with specific consideration of what I have coined 'collaborative modesty': networks of male and female collaborators that influence the composition, publication, and reception of women writers' texts and protect women writers in public. My work seeks to re-examine our understanding of early modern French women's writing, defined primarily by second-wave feminist scholarship. While this existing body of scholarship was fundamental to the establishment of medieval and early modern women writers in the literary canon, it often reduced them to what Tamara Harvey called the categories of 'submissive' and 'subversive'. My thesis proposes a more complex interpretation of early modern French women that accounts for nuanced positions that they

take, and make; it provides a new way of thinking about a woman's agency in this period as well as dispelling the myth of the solitary male author, to make room for a translocational literary collaboration which encompasses various participants.

My methodology is underscored by two approaches which interact with each other throughout my thesis: close textual analysis paired with an exploration of historical context. In all four chapters of my thesis the combination of these approaches affords a deeper understanding of my corpus, highlighting how events and cultural ideals from early modern Europe shaped the cultural, political, and religious allusions that my chosen women writers work with, and the words and actions of their male and female collaborators. It achieves this while simultaneously providing an insight into what the texts within my corpus reveal about the historical context within which they were composed, published, and received. In the first three chapters, I begin the first section with a micro analysis of chosen texts, exploring how location, genre, and gender conventions influence women writers' responses to modesty. I briefly track *(im)pudeur* and its cognate terms, but mainly trace specific thematic commentaries and their connotations, including virginity, chastity, desire, sex, the female body, nudity, and silence. This is followed by a second section which develops a more macro approach; it documents the shift from manuscript to print, unearthing the circumstances within which these texts came into being and were disseminated. Most notably, I examine the role of daughters in shaping a favourable view, both contemporary to and retrospective of their mothers; I identify historical events, editorial choices, and paratexts which illustrate their involvement in their mothers' entry into print. My fourth chapter brings forth a second type of collaborative modesty, led by male printers, editors, poets, and writers. Using the same macro approach from the first three chapters, I analyze the roles of men in facilitating women's entry in print. Together, my dually inflected methodology and the micro-macro analytical framework present a rich examination of the changing status of the immodest

woman in print across the sixteenth century, as well as the often personal and highly charged responses that early modern French women writers make about modesty to understand the cultural, political, and religious conditions in which they live.

I elaborate on my methodology and analytical framework in my introduction, using Max Weber's notion of the 'ideal type' to ground the close readings that I make throughout the thesis. An ideal type, as Ian Maclean explains, is 'a category […] or a trend or process' that can be used to acquire information about the particular; its 'specificity can be gauged by subtracting their individual features from the generic description of that ideal type.' Modesty thus becomes a heuristic category through which I examine the intricacies of agency and collaboration in women writers' works and their printing histories in different thematic and physical locations in early modern society. The ideal type of modesty is delineated by a selection of early modern conduct manuals and a keyword history of *pudeur* which is largely informed by the extensive research of Dominique Brancher, who notes its links with shame, embarrassment, honour, and chastity, among other key terms. Brancher's work on modesty in early modern medical texts inspires my exploration of modesty as a powerful veil which conceals and reveals the female body in literary texts. Furthermore, Patricia Pender's analysis of authorial disavowals and Tamara Harvey's study of seventeenth-century women's writers' responses to modesty in the Americas, inform the first aspect of my study which searches for specific commentaries of modesty in sixteenth-century French women's writing. I aim to see what these adjacent discourses reveal about the appropriation of modesty across different genres and locations in France and, within this process, the acquisition of agency on the part of women writers and their daughters in the world of print. In my introduction, I show women's agency to be a fundamental question in this context, one which takes on new momentum in relation to the second aspect of my thesis which explores the interpretation of printing as an immodest and vulgar act and the male

networks of collaborative modesty that protect women writers in print. I reflect on this social perception of print and note both the varying degree of influence that it has on my chosen women writers and the different reasons for the intervention of male and female collaborators in their stories. I argue the need to expand our definition of literary collaboration, which has been primarily shaped by English literature and queer studies. In my introduction, I explore some aspects of this recent scholarship. In so doing, I suggest that literary collaboration can be seen as a practice that works across genders, an act that may simultaneously restrict and liberate women writers and involve various collaborators in the process, such as editors, writers, and family members.

Chapter 1, 'Marguerite de Navarre: Chastity, Choice, and The Court in Early Sixteenth-Century Nérac', begins with an examination of Marguerite de Navarre's play, the *Comédie des quatre femmes*. In the first section of this chapter, I contextualize Marguerite's writing by capturing something of the significant role that Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne, plays in the subject matter, printing, and reception of Marguerite's posthumous work, *L'Heptaméron*. I also trace the influence of Jeanne d'Albret, on the composition of the *Comédie*, as a young girl struggling to gain agency against political duty. In this account, I follow the transition from the play's probable performance in 1542 to its printed edition in 1547. In my second section, I perform a close-reading of the *Comédie*. I argue that the play fosters a setting of intellectual discussion about modesty, chastity, and choice through questions of love and womanhood. Inspired by the Italian tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* and the discussions and debates that took place at the court of Nérac, Marguerite uses the voices of different female courtiers or masked figures to put forward different possibilities for women in society. In this hypothetical space, away from men, I contend that she leaves it up to her different audiences to interpret these discussions as they wish. For her female audience there is an intriguing commentary about the agency that a woman can gain through

desire, independence with and without love, and married chastity as a symbol of a woman's relationship with God. From these discourses of womanhood, I show how Marguerite uses the *Comédie* as a testing ground for her examination of agency and in doing so challenges the governing forces of modesty. To conclude this chapter, I make my final reflections on the mother-daughter collaborative network and Jeanne's collaboration with editor Claude Gruget for *L'Heptaméron*. From this examination, I locate a desire on Jeanne's part to facilitate Marguerite's place in print and to construct a favourable retrospective image of her mother who was viewed with suspicion for her Reformist views.

Moving towards the latter part of the sixteenth century, Chapter 2, 'Les Dames des Roches: The Body, Conflict, and The Salon in Late Sixteenth-Century Poitiers', considers responses to modesty in the works of Madeleine and Catherine des Roches. The first section of this chapter delves into the violence and consequences of the French Wars of Religion in Poitiers and how these influence Madeleine's two responses to modesty. Firstly, in odes 6 and 8 of *Les Œuvres*, Madeleine deflects her own immodest status as a writer in print onto immodest Huguenots. Secondly, in ode 4 and sonnet 8 of *Les Œuvres* she desexualizes her own body and soul through illness and old age, to reveal herself to be powerless as a writer and widow. In my second section I argue that the influence of local salon culture and the events of the *Grands Jours* in Poitiers encourage her daughter, Catherine, to link the female body to intellectual inspiration. In her poem *La Puce* (*Les Secondes Œuvres*) Catherine engages with local discourses which categorize her as a silent, eroticized woman to seize her body, away from male conquest. Secondly, through her poetic version of the mythological story of Agnodike, *L'Agnodice* (*Les Œuvres*), Catherine links the female body with knowledge; she creates an ideal space, inspired by her real-life salon, to grant women control over their voices and bodies. The final section of this chapter assesses collaborative modesty between this mother-daughter duo. In consideration of their mutual dedications and

Catherine's *Le Ravissement de Proserpine* (*Les Missives*), I argue that, to justify their immodest places in print and their statuses as a widow (Madeleine) and a deliberately unmarried and childless woman (Catherine), they reinforce the discourses that their male collaborators create for them as examples of female virtue and duty.

Chapter 3, 'Gabrielle de Coignard: Religion, Desire, and The *Cabinet* in Late Sixteenth-Century Toulouse', concentrates on Gabrielle de Coignard's responses to modesty. Inspired by the intimate space of her private *cabinet*, I argue that Coignard creates two responses. Firstly, in sonnets 15 and 38 of her *Œuvres chrestiennes* she builds an intimate relationship with God by way of the female body. Using tropes from Petrarchan poetry, she exposes herself to a deep erotic desire within a deeply religious space to explore her devotional identity. In the second section of this chapter I demonstrate how Coignard engages with widowhood in sonnets 80 and 81; through expressions of pain, she develops a feminized devotion which transforms the female body into something divine, and she justifies her widowhood by presenting God as a second husband. The third section of this chapter focuses on the mother-daughter collaborative modesty between Coignard and her daughters, Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal. I argue that her daughters work with an unnamed editor to commission and shape the posthumous reception of their mother's work. They create a community of women in their paratext, *Aux Dames devotieuses*, to legitimize her authorship and elevate her reputation. In doing so they extend Coignard's own creation of a community of women in her *Imitation de la victoire de Judith,* a work in which she identifies with religious conflict in Toulouse and she presents herself as the mirror image of the biblical Judith.

Chapter 4 represents one final key aspect of this thesis. Entitled 'Print, Protection, and Promiscuity in Sixteenth-Century France: Male Networks of Collaborative Modesty', it brings men into the discussion of modesty, print, and literary collaboration. It is split into

three sections which cover male forms of collaborative modesty that are found in the printing histories of the three sets of women writers of this study. After an introductory discussion of women in print and male collaborative modesty, the first section begins with an analysis of the dedications of Clément Marot (*De Madame la Duchesse d'Alençon*), Jehan Du Pré (*Le Palais des nobles dames*), François Rabelais (preface to *Le Tiers Livre*) and Simon Sylvius (*A tresillustre & treschrestienne Princesse*) which praise Marguerite de Navarre as a *femme de bien*. Such figures, I argue, endorse her position in print and deflect attention away from her Reformist views. In the second section of this chapter, I consider the dedications of Louis Le Grand (*Elegie sur le Trespas de Mesdames des Roches de Poictiers mere et fille*) and Scévole de Sainte-Marthe (*Eloges des hommes illustres, qui depuis un siècle ont fleury en France dans la profession des lettres*) as well as the letters of Estienne Pasquier to his friend, Pierre Pithou (*Les Lettres*); in their different ways, these express deep admiration for the Dames des Roches. These men capitalize on the writers' maternal-filial bond and present them as honourable women despite their transgression into the 'vulgar' sphere of print, an unseemly activity for two new members of the *noblesse de robe*. Finally, in section three, I examine collaborative modesty in the publication history of Gabrielle de Coignard, whose name comes into print after her death. By this point in the century, a certain type of woman could appear more easily in print; a staunchly catholic woman, Coignard's spiritual poetry emerges when devotional literature is in vogue. Nevertheless, alongside her daughters, the printers Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles collaborate with an unnamed editor to present her as more than simply acceptable: a modest model for women to emulate. The editor's sonnets, *Sur les vers de feu Madame de Miremont* and *Dialogue: Philandre et Tolose* portray Coignard as an intellectually gifted and honourable woman who brings glory to her home city of Toulouse.

My conclusion establishes what can be learned from this study of modesty and collaborative modesty: firstly, that we should nuance the ways in which early modern French women writers have been understood. It demonstrates that women writers may move beyond submission and subversion to seek different forms of agency through their commentaries on modesty. Secondly, my study provides a more complicated understanding of collaboration which spans different genders and is, crucially, translocational. It does not simply consist of poets and writers; daughters, printers, and editors, for example, all play an important role in literary creation. The examples that I provide in this thesis reveal an opportunity to explore collaborative modesty in the works of other women writers across the early modern period and different locations. Using modesty as a heuristic tool to understand early modern women's writing allows for a more holistic and innovative way of thinking about women's agency and gender in this period. The study of collaborative modesty offers more scope to discover the creative responses to the cultural, political, and religious conditions which early modern women develop and experience both for themselves, and for their future readers.

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Introduction

Pierre de Changy, in his 1542 translation of Juan Luis Vives's conduct manual, *Livre de l'institution d'une femme chrestienne*, crystallizes for French readers a strikingly gendered interpretation of modesty as a primary feature of a woman's identity. The preface to their work argues that of all female traits, 'le premier & le principal est Pudicité'.[1] When exploring the 'uses, meanings and contexts'[2] of *pudeur* and its cognates across the sixteenth century, we can trace a number of associations. *Pudeur* has welcomed various cognate terms, ranging from Changy's *pudicité*, through to *pudique*, *pudicicie, pudorité* and *pudenda*. The French term originates from the Latin *pudor*, which was firstly linked with a distinctly more physical form of modesty, and with shame or *verecundia*. In fact, as Dominique Brancher's pioneering work in this area suggests, *pudor*, and its Greek equivalent, αἰσχυνη, were so closely tied with the term *verecundia* that they were indistinguishable.[3]

According to the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, *pudor* was an emotion or passion whose symptoms were exhibited through blushing.[4] Cicero, in his *De Officiis* (44 BC), lauded it as a universal virtue in its reflection of nature's tendency to veil that which was shameful.[5] With the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, the concept took on a more

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[1] Juan Luis Vives, *Livre de l'Institution d'une femme chrestienne tant en son enfance que marriage et viduité, aussi de l'office du mary,* ed. by Achille Delboulle, trans. by Pierre de Changy (Havre: Lemale, 1891), p. 17. In Vives's original Latin version of the conduct manual, he uses the term 'pudicitiae'; see Juan Luis Vives, *De Institutione feminae Christianae*, eds. by Charles Fantazzi and Constantinus Matheeussen, trans. by Charles Fantazzi, 2 vols (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996-1998), I (1996), p. 4.

[2] Richard Scholar, 'The New Philologists', in *Renaissance Keywords*, ed. by Ita Mac Carthy (London: Legenda, 2013), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

[3] Dominique Brancher, *Équivoques de la pudeur: Fabrique d'une passion à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2015), pp. 61-62.

[4] Ibid., p. 45.

[5] Ibid., pp. 82-83. The terms veiling and unveiling, used throughout this study, are deliberate choices. They allude to the contemporary issue of veiling truth and female bodies. Anna Kemp discusses this in her work on the modern-day perception of veiled Muslim women as either victims or disguised threats. She notes, as I do here, that the veil raises important questions of voice, female agency and negotiations of space within male discourses. See Anna Kemp, *Voices and Veils: Feminism and Islam in French Women's Writing and Activism* (London: Legenda, 2010).

moralistic tone. Aquinas implied that *pudeur* was the fruit of *impudeur* or immodesty, stemming from original sin.[6] In his *City of God* (413-26 AD), St Augustine used the doctrine of original sin to highlight shame as symbolic of 'unruly desire' whose origins were found in the naked body; this desire both represented and was moved by the body.[7] For this reason, he noted that the genitals should be called *pudenda*, or shameful parts and that 'all peoples' cover their sexual organs, even 'barbarians'.[8] Since Augustine perceived shame as a 'universal human phenomenon' that was 'rooted deep in human nature', blushing therefore underlined an organic demonstration of sexual desire; it was God's way of making humans experience the burning of shame.[9] Aquinas sexualized *pudeur* further, and like St Augustine, agreed that combined with *honestus* (honour), *pudeur* moderated more carnal pleasures.[10] Young people and women, Aquinas argued, were naturally more inclined to passions of the flesh; they were therefore required to show more *pudeur* than others.[11] Randle Cotgrave demonstrates this tight connection between shame, nakedness, and sexual desire in early modern culture in his seventeenth-century dictionary, defining *pudique* as 'chast […] shamefull, modest' and *impudique* as 'obscene, shamelesse'.[12] But this masks a shift in sixteenth-century usage, whereby *pudeur* generally became known as a 'bonne honte', whilst shame or *honte* was increasingly defined as a 'mauvaise honte'.[13] *Pudeur* was therefore perceived to be a praiseworthy attribute.

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[6] Brancher, *Équivoques*, pp. 60, 65.
[7] Hannah Dawson, 'Shame in Early Modern Thought: From Sin to Sociability', *History of European Ideas*, 45.3 (2018), 377-98 (p. 384).
[8] St. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 578.
[9] Dawson, 'Shame', 384.
[10] Brancher, *Équivoques*, pp. 65, 67.
[11] Ibid., p. 67.
[12] Randall Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1659), pp. 385, 272. All of the early modern texts referenced in this thesis have been quoted with original spelling and punctuation.
[13] Brancher, *Équivoques*, p. 61.

As a 'bonne honte', the concepts of chastity and *pudeur* became inseparable in the sixteenth century,[14] with a clear emphasis placed on women retaining their chastity as a mark of female and family honour.[15] Indeed, as we have already seen by the number of male commentators of *pudeur*, the notion was a largely male-defined one, which demonstrated *pudeur*'s connection with reputation or a woman's public image. In fact, it was vital for entry into civilized society.[16] We find this notion as far back as Virgil's lament of Dido in the *Aeneid* (19 BC). Upon the departure of her beloved Aeneas after implied sexual intercourse, Dido exclaims that she has lost *pudor*, and with this her loss of *fama*, meaning esteem or reputation. Her immodesty represents 'failure and death':[17]

> [T]e propter eundem
> exstinctus pudor et, qua sola sidera adibam,
> fama prior[.]
>
> Because of you I have also lost my honour and that former fame by which alone I was winning a title to the stars.[18]

In a society which expressed anxieties of female misdemeanour, this conflation reflected social and moral control of behaviour, and the fact that the virginal woman was 'a passive subject' who was 'meant to be gazed at'.[19] But early modern culture experienced contradictions as to whether it was appropriate or not to showcase the body. Vives and Changy make their view clear, stating that a female who experienced 'honte & crainte' towards her body would be 'louee & exaltee'.[20] As if to reinforce such cultural obligations,

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[14] Ibid., p. 75.
[15] Susan Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade in Sixteenth-century France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 158. See also Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 30.
[16] Brancher, *Équivoques*, p. 22.
[17] Dalida Agri, 'Marching towards Masculinity: Female *pudor* in Statius' Thebaid and Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica', *Latomus* (2014), 721-47 (p. 747).
[18] Virgil, 'Aeneid. Book IV', in *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1 - 6*, ed. by G. P. Goold, trans. by Henry Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916-1918), I (1916), ll. 321-23, pp. 443-45.
[19] Sara F. Matthews-Grieco, 'The Body, Appearance and Sexuality', in *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. by Natalie Z. Davis and Arlette Farge, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992-1994), III (1993), pp. 46-84 (p. 48); Agri, 'Marching towards Masculinity', 746.
[20] Vives, *Livre*, p. 81.

pudeur was cast as natural by many, including Erasmus, who declared that nature required the concealment of bodies, even in the intimacy of the bedroom.[21] Evolving to encompass shame and embarrassment specifically towards sexual matters, *pudeur* encouraged the concealment of the *parties pudibondes* – 'shameful' sexual organs.

Yet, *pudeur* was by no means a stable concept; it rested on certain conceptual tensions, not least of which was the question as to its natural or artificial quality. New World discoveries forced Europeans to reassess the association of shame and original sin and to come to terms with the cultural lack of *pudeur*. Jean de Léry's observations of indigenous tribes in Brazil noted that they embraced nakedness as a form of honesty, showing 'aucun signe d'en avoir honte ni vergogne'; they were acting naturally in a way that mirrored their entry into the world from the mother's womb.[22] Léry implied that perhaps clothing was symbolic of artifice. Likewise, in contrast to Erasmus's views, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) has pre-marital couples revealing their naked bodies to each other;[23] in Renaissance art, nudity was valued and studied by artists;[24] and in the literary world, the poetic *blason* tradition dedicated lines of verse to a female beloved's physical attributes.[25]

Perceptions of *pudeur* were therefore far from unanimous, and boundaries between revealing and concealing the *(im)pudique* body were distinctly blurred. Michel de Montaigne addressed this link between revealing and concealing. He noted that *pudeur*, whilst aiming to veil something of an erotic or scandalous nature, could paradoxically unveil that very something.[26] This came at a time when the concept of *pudeur* expanded to language. *Pudeur du langage*, for Montaigne, was natural, and to speak with modesty was

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[21] Brancher, *Équivoques*, p. 86.
[22] Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil 1557*, ed. by Frank Lestringant (Montpellier: Max Chaleil, 1992), p. 86.
[23] Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. by Clarence H. Miller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 97.
[24] Matthews-Grieco, 'The Body', p. 46.
[25] See Kathleen P. Long, *High Anxiety: Masculinity in Crisis in Early Modern France* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002), p. 28.
[26] Brancher, *Équivoques*, pp. 77-78.

to ironically engage in 'un parler scandaleux'.[27] *Pudeur* therefore possessed an *impudique* power; it was part of a veiled discourse which could eroticize intimacy subversively.[28]

This aspect of *pudeur*'s force has become a topic of recent scholarly interest. Unveiling the paradoxical thread of *pudeur impudique* in Renaissance anatomical texts, Dominique Brancher has shown *pudeur* to be a powerful veil for the *médecin pornographe*: one which both conceals and reveals.[29] Brancher's pioneering research does, however, neglect a different portrayal of *pudeur*, one which may redefine our contemporary understanding of early modern French women's writing. As a concept that is often gendered as feminine and deployed, often oppressively, by male writers, women writers can also work with and reclaim modesty in a number of different ways, as scholarship on early modern English women's writing has shown. Patricia Pender's rethinking of the 'rhetorical nature of authorial disavowals'[30] provides a useful way of interpreting the female appropriation of modesty tropes, and Tamara Harvey has traced seventeenth-century women writers' conceptualizations of *pudeur* in the Americas.[31] Such Anglo-American women scholars have, then, attested to a thread of specifically female responses to *pudeur* running through different early modern locations. More recently, Hannah Dawson has examined the concept of shame in early modern thought and its deep-rooted conceptual entanglement with sex; she demonstrates that shame is a 'contingent, culturally specific phenomenon' entailing a human's interaction with a gaze which turns inwards, and society at large.[32] Chastity's close connection with shame, and honour, has long been established as a demonstration of social control. In the fields of early modern English, Spanish and French literature, we find

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[27] Ibid., p. 166. See also Michel de Montaigne, 'Sur des vers de Virgile', in *Essais*, *Livre III*, ed. by Alexandre Micha, 3 vols (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969-1979), III (1979), p. 103.
[28] Brancher, *Équivoques*, p. 91.
[29] Ibid., p. 12.
[30] Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 3.
[31] Tamara Harvey, *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 2.
[32] Dawson, 'Shame', 2.

examples of writers who depict the importance of chastity as woman's highest virtue.[33] Cathy Hampton, especially, locates the discrepancies between the ways in which chastity affects men's and women's public standing. Clearly, in the court of Francis I, chastity is imposed upon women as a marker of their family's honour, while for men it remains largely optional and bears little or no influence on their reputations.[34] In my own examination of chastity here and in the chapters which follow, I build on Bonnie Johnson's understanding of chastity as potentially freeing for women; she sees, for instance, Queen Henrietta Maria's celebration of chastity as a marker of female monastic devotion which enables women to pursue 'moral and religious truth' in an 'all-female devotional space'.[35] In this thesis, I hope to show that chastity can be reconfigured as an expression of female agency and an alternative to social control.

Building on this scholarship, I wish to tease out a specific strand of *pudeur* in sixteenth-century France. Using early modern understandings of the concept, I examine how four women writers across the century consider the constraints, the force, and the freedoms of modesty in a selection of their literary works. By analyzing the varying shifts, tonalities, and voices that operate within these women's works in specific places – at once physical and thematic – I determine how far their literary works accompany and counter meanings of *pudeur* in circulation. Equally, I emphasize the transitions between the composition of texts and their appearance in print and what this means for women in print who are judged as *impudiques*. Do women writers conform to *pudeur*'s requirements or do they find a way

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[33] See Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); Frederik C. Ljungqvist, 'Female Shame, Male Honor: The Chastity Code in Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae christianae*', *Journal of Family History*, 37.2 (2012), 139-54; Allyson Poska, 'Elusive Virtue: Rethinking the Role of Female Chastity in Early Modern Spain', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 8.1 (2004), 135-46.

[34] See Cathy Hampton, 'Francis I as the Chaste Lover: Almanque Papillon's *Nouvel Amour* (1543)', *The Modern Language Review*, 93.3 (1998), 642-58.

[35] Bonnie L. Johnson, *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 118.

of appropriating it, finding agency within its constraints, or even challenging it in their texts? This exploration does not solely consist of tracking cognate terms of *pudeur* or *impudeur* that some women writers use; this forms a very small part of my study. It primarily articulates the treatment of textual commentaries and ideas that relate to *(im)pudeur*: virginity, chastity, desire, sex, the female body, nudity, and silence, for example. For this reason, from this point onwards I refer to *pudeur* as 'modesty'; this allows me to address *pudeur* as a concept, and also to encompass the richness of its connotations and related concepts. I explore how the importance of modesty may change over time and emphasize the shifts or movement between locations in the production and circulation of texts, from salon type structures to printed works. From this study, I establish whether women writers in sixteenth-century France experimented with the dictates of modesty and achieved agency from reconfiguring its scope or questioning its place in society.

Historically Renaissance women writers have been framed within the *topoi* of voice and identity.[36] Under second-wave feminism, the desire to challenge the male literary canon sparked the arrival 'of a new academic discipline',[37] firmly entrenching women writers in literary history.[38] Moreover, Joan Kelly acknowledges the long line of female medieval and early-modern writers who wrote with a particularly gendered way of thinking.[39] New work, including that of the SIEFAR,[40] has emerged alongside publications of pro-women writing falling within the long-running 'Querelle des femmes.'[41] Cecilia

[36] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 1.
[37] Ibid., p. 21.
[38] Jean-Philippe Beaulieu and Diane Desrosiers-Bonin, 'Les Études sur les femmes écrivains du XVI^{e} siècle français', *French Studies*, 65.3 (2011), 370-75 (p. 371).
[39] Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes, 1400-1789', *Signs*, 8.1 (1982), 4-28 (p. 4).
[40] Société internationale pour l'étude des femmes de l'Ancien Régime. See Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin, 'La "*Querelle des femmes*" est-elle une querelle? Philosophie et pseudo-linéarité dans l'histoire du feminisme', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 35 (2013), 69-79 (p. 73).
[41] Anke Gilleir and Alicia C. Montoya, 'Introduction: Toward a New Conception of Women's Literary History', in *Women Writing Back/Writing Women Back: Transnational Perspectives from the late Middle Ages*

Beach, David Trott, and Perry Gethner have equally provided better access to the works of female playwrights.[42] There is, of course, still more research to be done. While this existing work has been instrumental in shedding light on the position of women writers in patriarchal society, as Harvey notes, it has also pigeonholed them in relation to the categories of 'submissive' or 'subversive'[43] which neglects the 'nuanced and complex positions'[44] of their experiences.

We must engage with women writers within a different framework, by identifying nuances and complexities that have been overlooked. I seek to do this by using modesty as a heuristic category, and with specific reference to selected works of four French women writers: Marguerite de Navarre, Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, and Gabrielle de Coignard. These women span the sixteenth century and present intriguing responses to modesty within, and in relation to, three distinct geographical locations: Nérac, Poitiers, and Toulouse. Each of these locations further relates to, or emblematizes the more intimate environments of the court, the family home, and the *cabinet*. Partly contributing to and equally disrupting the tendency in recent scholarship to relate Renaissance women poets to cities and urban spaces, I seek to cross boundaries by engaging with four women writers who belong to different ranks in society, communicate their ideas through various literary genres, and interact with both urban and more conceptual spaces.[45] As women who live in

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to the Dawn of the Modern Era, ed. by Anke Gilleir, Alicia C. Montoya and Suzan van Dijk, Intersections, 75 vols (Boston, MA: Brill, 2001-2020), XVI (2010), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

[42] Aurore Evain, Perry Gethner and Henriette Goldwyn, 'Introduction', in *Théâtre de femmes de l'Ancien Régime, Tome I: XVI^e^ siècle*, ed. by Aurore Evain, Perry Gethner and Henriette Goldwyn, 5 vols (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014-2016), I (2014), pp. 7-29 (p. 12).

[43] Harvey, *Figuring Modesty*, p. 2.

[44] Ibid., p. 141.

[45] For example, see Ann R. Jones, 'City Women and Their Audiences: Louise Labé and Veronica Franco', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 299-316; Ann R. Jones, 'Contentious Readings: Urban Humanism and Gender Difference in *La Puce de Madame Des-Roches* (1582)', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48.1 (1995), 109-28; Ann R. Jones, 'Pernette du Guillet, Lyonnais Neoplatonist', in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 219-31; Madeleine Lazard, *Louise Labé, Lyonnaise* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); Kendall B. Tarte, *Writing Places: Sixteenth-Century City Culture and the Des Roches Salon* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

different periods of the sixteenth century and reside in different places in France, the four women in this study present an invaluable opportunity to understand temporal, thematic, and topographical influences on women writers' literary responses to modesty. Moreover, they all provide challenging commentaries of modesty through the treatment of womanhood, the body, and desire. Their individual stories highlight intriguing similarities regarding both the involvement of daughters in their entry into print, and the ways in which they are presented in the eyes of their male peers.

My study is divided into four chapters, three of which analyze a specific response to modesty, and tracks the emergence of a creative response to the complex nexus of location, textual production, and circulation, which forms part of my final chapter. I consider sixteenth-century understandings of modesty as an 'ideal type' in relation to which my chosen women writers' experiences of modesty, shaped by various locations in France, will be analysed and assessed. Coined by Max Weber, an ideal type is:

> a category […] or a trend or process […] postulated […] to obtain knowledge of particular events of the past whose specificity can be gauged by subtracting their individual features from the generic description of that ideal type. It is therefore a heuristic device […] perspectival, and not complete, […] a means of subjecting the past to a rigorous analysis which does not reduce the specificity of individual events[.][46]

As Ian Maclean shows, Max Weber's concept offers the advantage of focusing in on the particular while bearing in mind the general; it is a holistic way of considering the specific and wider implications of a given phenomenon. The ideal type is an instrumental tool of comparison which, in my study, helps to compare different empirical responses with the broader concept of modesty. To mitigate the risk of focusing on extreme or polar strands of modesty without considering connections between them (a common challenge when

[46] Ian Maclean, 'The Process of Intellectual Change: A Post-Foucauldian Hypothesis', in *Cultural History After Foucault*, ed. by John Neubauer (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 163-76 (pp. 166-67). See also Max Weber, 'The "Objectivity" of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy', in *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, eds. by Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, trans. by Hans Henrik Bruun (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 100-38 (pp. 123-25).

working with ideal types), I focus on women writers from different backgrounds and locations in France. Furthermore, I place great emphasis on assessing these different responses in relation to one another as well as to the ideal type of modesty, in order to fully grasp the intricacies of modesty's influence on early modern French women.

The first chapter involves an examination of Marguerite de Navarre's response to the ideal type of modesty within the context of her court of Nérac. Inspired by her court, she creates her own specific understanding of and reaction to modesty. In her play, the *Comédie des quatre femmes* (1547), she addresses various types of womanhood, agency, chastity, choice, and love within a hypothetical space of debate and discussion. Moving towards the latter half of the sixteenth-century, my second chapter focuses on the mother-daughter duo, Madeleine and Catherine des Roches and their works, *Les Œuvres* (1578)*, Les Secondes Œuvres* (1583) and *Les Missives* (1586). These were a collection of poetry and prose, and *Les Missives* includes the first printed private letters by women in France. The two women are intimately tied to their home city of Poitiers, a locus of both religious conflict and poetic inspiration. Madeleine's odes 6 and 8 (*Œuvres*) reveal a specific link between anti-Protestant sentiment and immodesty in localized accounts of religious conflict. Equally I delve into Madeleine's interpretations of her own female body, soul, and ill health in ode 4 and sonnet 8 (*Œuvres*). I then examine Catherine's association of the female body with knowledge in *La Puce* (*Secondes Œuvres*) and *L'Agnodice* (*Œuvres*), and her quest to challenge the importance of shame which has traditionally been used to qualify a woman's body. My third chapter considers Gabrielle de Coignard, positioned between Marguerite and Madeleine. Her staunch faith leads her to express two commentaries about modesty which are entrenched in a confessional space, her *cabinet toulousain*. In sonnets 15 and 36 of her *Œuvres chrestiennes* (1594), she uses an erotic discourse to describe a woman's relationship with God which allows her to explore her own devotional identity and to express a female

desire that will not be chastised. In comparison with Madeleine, her status as a widow leads her to defend this position in sonnets 13 and 80, by presenting God as a second husband, and she constructs a feminine spirituality which fashions the female body as a divine and honourable vessel. Indeed, each response to modesty reveals her loyalty to the Catholic faith which awards her a special place during the Counter-Reformation movement. In these different women's responses to modesty, each writer views their location as a topical extension and analogy for their own identity, for some of them, this further encompasses their position as immodest women in print.

Why immodest? The women's stories become more complex and urgent when considering the common associations between print and sexual deviance which provoked suspicions of female promiscuity and compromised a woman's modesty, to varying degrees across the sixteenth century.[47] While society was no stranger to women's writing in manuscript form, in contrast, a woman who printed her works transgressed too far into the public sphere which exposed her to 'irresistible sexual temptation'.[48] A common claim was that a woman who broke the vow of silence also broke the vow of chastity. The anxiety to keep women out of public discourse is demonstrated by John Calvin who accused poet Louise Labé of cross-dressing and being a *plebeia meretrix*, a common whore, in his pamphlet of 1561.[49] His allusion to her cross-dressing is perhaps a reflection of her 'masculine' ability to transgress from the private female sphere into the supposedly male territory of print. Furthermore, a second aspect of the printing sphere was that it was

[47] Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 280.
[48] Ann R. Jones, 'Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric', in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 74-95 (p. 78).
[49] Ann R. Jones and Nancy J. Vickers, 'Canon, Rule and the Restoration Renaissance', *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1988), 9-25 (p. 22).

perceived as an uncouth and 'lower-class activity'; male and female elite figures had to try hard to 'counter the force of this stigma'.[50]

The connection made between writing and promiscuity spanned different European cultures. Conduct manual writers, across France, Italy, Spain, and England, were determined to control such acts of defiance. In his *De re uxoria* (1513), Francesco Barbaro made a direct link between writing and immodesty, comparing a woman's speech to the exposure of her arms, both of which should remain private.[51] According to Barbaro, women should be restrained to the government of family life to avoid sexual misdemeanour, which was brought on by the 'learning of humayne arts'.[52] Giovanni Bruto also stressed that the only objects for a woman were the 'needle, the wheele, the distaff, and the spindle'.[53] In England Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrons* (1582) summarized a long tradition of thinking which claimed that a woman should express 'silence, shamefastnes, and chastitie, both of body & mind'.[54] Moreover, Thomas Salter's *Mirrhor of Modesty* (1579) emphasized women's domesticity in its concentration on a woman's education in household chores,[55] agreeing with Richard Braithwaite and Vives that silence – a 'grant aornement a la femme'[56] – was proof of her chastity which should never be jeopardized in public. After all, a woman's lack of chastity not only reflected badly on her own reputation but also on the honour of her husband and/or her family.[57] Similarly, in France we find Jean Bouchet's frequent warnings

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[50] Wall, *Imprint*, p. 281.
[51] Ann R. Jones, 'City Women', pp. 299-300.
[52] Ibid., p. 300.
[53] Giovanni M. Bruto, *The Necessarie, Fit, and Conuenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman written both in French and Italian, and translated into English by W.P And now printed with the three languages together in one volume, for the better instruction of such as are desirous to studie those tongues*, trans. by William Phiston (London: Adam Islip, 1598), p. G2.
[54] Margaret P. Hannay, 'Introduction', in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), p. 4.
[55] Janis B. Holm, 'The Myth of a Feminist Humanism: Tom Salter's *The Mirrhor of Modestie*', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 67.4 (1984), 443-52 (p. 446).
[56] Vives, *Livre*, p. 97.
[57] Margaret L. King & Albert Rabil Jr., 'The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series', in Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues and Letters of Les Dames des Roches*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006), pp. xi-xxxii (p. xvi).

to ‘pucelles’ in his conduct manuals to refrain from speaking openly in public, to save their reputations as chaste or ‘honnestes filles’.[58] Modesty and publication were thus perceived as mutually exclusive.

This dilemma raises the question of how women writers were able to have their works printed while avoiding accusations of immodesty and vulgarity. I have chosen to focus on women who maintained their modest reputations, even beyond their lifetime. This is to better explore the second and equally important aspect of my examination of modesty; namely a solution to the problem of going public, which I have termed ‘collaborative modesty’: networks of male and female collaborators who help to alter or shape the image that the reader has of a woman in print, and so protect the women’s reputations against contemporary critics. Implicitly in my first three chapters and then explicitly in my fourth chapter, I set out my contribution to the ways in which early modern women writers should be understood in respect of ‘collaborative modesty’. I also determine whether the link between immodesty and print, as well as a woman’s place in print, changes over time and affects women differently depending on their statuses in the sixteenth century. A more esteemed and already public figure such as Marguerite, for instance, may not face the stigma of being attached to the ‘vulgar' print form compared with female members of the *noblesse de robe*, such as the Dames des Roches, but she may be viewed with more suspicion due to her controversial religious beliefs.

The men and women involved in collaborative modesty may be relatives, editors, printers, fellow poets, writers, and other intellectuals, for example. Indeed, during this period it was commonplace for women authors to have collaborative alliances between these types of figures.[59] They heavily influence the composition, publication, and/or the reception of the

[58] Jones, ‘Contentious Readings’, 112.
[59] See Leah L. Chang, *Into Print: The Production of Female Authorship in Early Modern France* (Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp. 17-26.

texts and their female authors. These collaborators are not to be confused with exemplars; models from which the women seek inspiration. We see this very clearly in Marguerite's set of moves, which stem from Giovanni Boccaccio and the Italian theatrical tradition, or in Coignard's employment of tropes from Louise Labé, Francesco Petrarch and Pierre de Ronsard. These women use their contemporaries and predecessors as models and alter conventions and contexts for their own interests. In intervening in the printing histories of women writers in print, male and female collaborators justify women's publications and protect their reputations in the public sphere. This protection does not have to be offered to women writers in their lifetime; collaborative modesty can equally represent a more passive act for women who may benefit from the work of collaborators in forging a positive retrospective image of the woman poet and/or writer in question.

Certain forms of literary collaboration have already been explored for over two decades by scholars, particularly in modern English literature studies and queer studies, which understand writing to be a social practice.[60] The question of multiple authorship finds its roots in the story of the 'death of the author' which presents authorship as a modern concept, a 'product of our society'.[61] Since Roland Barthes's 1967 essay, scholars have questioned the myth of the monolithic author, one which lauds the individual's creativity and imagination in inventing fiction beyond all constraints.[62] This image, which has been

[60] See Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Lisa Hager, 'Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture', *British Women Writers* 8.2 (2010), 421-24; Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male literary Collaboration* (London: Routledge, 1989); Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson, eds, *Literary Couplings: Writing couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

[61] Lisa S. Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), p. 87. See also Roland Barthes, 'La Mort de l'auteur', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993-1995), II (1993), pp. 491-95; Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur', *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*, 63.3 (1969), 73-104.

[62] Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 211, 219-20.

accepted as virtually universal, truly originates in post-Enlightenment thought. During the Romantic period, the myth of the 'genius' presented the poet as a prophet or a demigod who possessed transcendent knowledge.[63] Some scholars have located this idea in William Wordsworth's poem in the final book of *The Prelude* (1850):

> Here must thou be, O Man!
> Power to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
> Here keepest thou in singleness thy state:
> No other can divide with thee this work:
> No secondary hand can intervene
> To Fashion this ability; 't is thine,
> The prime and vital principle is thine
> In the recesses of thy nature, far
> From any reach of outward fellowship,
> Else is not thine at all.[64]

Here, they claim that he 'codifies the authorial process as an ultimately solitary one', which only relies on a creative mind and resolutely denounces the joint enterprise of an author and their collaborators.[65] Wordsworth and his peers exhibit the genius to be gendered male: women were denied the right to be perceived as creative writers; they were seen as 'artistic inferiors'.[66] As Christine Battersby notes, this viewpoint found its roots most notably in the Renaissance period when women were thought to lack wit, judgement, and skill.[67] Moving away from this discourse, scholars have sought to find moments in which women collaborators, or writers in their own right, 'negotiate, modify or subvert; existing ideology and in turn provoke cultural anxiety.[68] Equally, these scholars have noted their places in 'collaboration', a term which is 'itself neutral, [and] can mean many things'.[69] In scholarship

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[63] M. Thomas Inge, 'Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship', *PMLA*, 116.3 (2001), 623-30 (p. 624).
[64] William Wordsworth, 'Book Fourteenth Conclusion', in *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth,* ed. by Paul D. Sheats (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), ll. 209-19, p. 219.
[65] Annachiara Cozzi, 'The Dissolution of the Author in Literary Collaboration: Two Case Studies', *Altre Modernità*, 14 (2018), 12-26 (p. 15).
[66] Christine Battersby, 'Gender and Genius (The Clouded Mirror)', in *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics*, ed. by Joseph J. Tanke and Colin McQuillan (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 559-70 (p. 559).
[67] For more information about the evolution of the concept of the 'solitary genius' see Ibid., pp. 559-70.
[68] Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 12.
[69] Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, p. 3.

of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various scholars have depicted collaboration as a practice between writers, homosocial and homoerotic partners, married couples, and other family members. As part of a revisionist narrative, Lucy Newlyn has equally reassessed the understanding of poets like Wordsworth within a more collaborative framework; she draws attention to an influential writing partnership between Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, as representative of their quest to locate a joint family identity following their childhood separation.[70] Moreover, Neil Kenny has explored what he calls the 'family function' collaborative network in early modern French literature.[71] These relationships reveal hidden moments of agency, negotiation, and restriction. Regarding the definition of collaboration, I align myself with Jerome McGann who includes more people into the equation of multiple authorship. It is 'a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority', a concept involving not only authors but publishers, editors, printers, booksellers, purchasers, readers, reviewers, critics, teachers, and students.[72]

While Jill R. Ehnenn and Wayne Koestenbaum have argued that literary collaboration can be best thought of as a queer, homosocial strategy, particularly in the nineteenth century, I perceive it in this study as a practice that can work across genders; I see this from a woman writer's perspective. My contribution to existing research lies with 'collaborative modesty', which allots space for many potential collaborators, including editors, writers and female family members. I undermine the myth of the singular 'male genius' and question the common understanding of authorship. As Charlotte Brontë demonstrates when she edited her late sister Emily's poetry and wrote an important

[70] See Lucy Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: All in Each Other* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xi-xiv.
[71] By 'family function', Kenny means 'the attribution of agency in the production of works not to individual authors but to families'. See Neil Kenny, *Born to Write: Literary Families and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 35-42.
[72] Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), p. 199.

'Biographical Notice' and 'Preface', a writer's reputation can be 'protected, reshaped and even cleansed in the eye of the meditator', even posthumously.[73] More importantly, women can be involved in this process of fashioning. I explore how male and women collaborators, in their multiple professions and relationships, help to protect the women writers' reputations in my study.[74] In this way, the women, spanning the sixteenth-century and different locations in France, have access to different forms of agency which they negotiate and modify according to their circumstances.

Collaborative modesty manifests itself in different ways, such as editing and organizing works, commissioning printers to publish the works of women writers and composing texts, dedications, and other paratexts to praise a woman writer, in women writers' texts or separate from them. These defend women writers and protect their reputations, sometimes by aligning them with other model *femmes de bien*.[75] As another vital aspect of each of the first three chapters of this study, I locate a mother-daughter collaborative network in which daughters play a prominent role in forging favourable images of their mothers, contemporarily or retrospectively, in the printing sphere. In Chapter 1, Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne d'Albret, plays an influential role in the composition, publication, and reception of the *Comédie* and *L'Heptaméron*. This occurs both during her mother's lifetime and posthumously in collaboration with Claude Gruget. In Chapter 2, the Dames des Roches' mother-daughter network, in the pair's mutual dedications, embody powerful 'strategies of legitimation',[76] as does Catherine's *Le Ravissement de Proserpine*.

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[73] Olivia Malfait and Marysa Demoor, 'Sibling Collaboration and Literary After-life: The Case of the Brontës', *Brontë Studies*, 40.3 (2015), 187-200 (p. 189).

[74] Rémi Jimenes and Susan Broomhall have investigated how editors and printers have influenced the works of authors. See Rémi Jimenes, *Charlotte Guillard: Une femme imprimeur de la Renaissance* (Tours: Presses universitaires François Rabelais, 2017); Susan Broomhall, *Women and Religion in Sixteenth-Century France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[75] Scholars have shown that prefaces can serve as a strategic defence against public suspicion and censure. See Anne R. Larsen, '"*Un honneste passetems*": Strategies of Legitimation in French Renaissance Women's Prefaces', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 30.4 (1990), 11-22; François Rigolot, 'La préface à la Renaissance: Un discours sexué?', *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, 42 (1990), 121-35.

[76] Larsen, '"*Un honneste passetems*", 11.

This bond runs throughout their poetry; Catherine especially mobilizes the concept of literary motherhood. Beyond paratexts, the very fact of having their works printed together solidifies the duo's collaborative modesty. In Chapter 3, I outline the mother-daughter relationship between Coignard and her daughters, Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal. Her daughters work behind the scenes to have their mother's work published and dedicate a preface to other devout women in Coignard's name. They form an important sisterhood, to accompany their mother in print, and tie their mother to the Catholic bastion of Toulouse, during a time of religious conflict, which Coignard also stages in her writing, *Imitation de la victoire de Judich*.

Certainly most, if not all, of these daughters rely on male collaborators to carry out their aims. Chapter 4 brings these men into the conversation and evaluates the prominence and manifestation of male collaborative modesty in the printing histories of all four women writers. In the first section of this chapter, we most notably locate the intervention of Clément Marot, François Rabelais, Jehan Du Pré, and Simone Sylvius, who construct dedications that form a layer of protection around Marguerite during her lifetime. In the following section, I explore how the Dames des Roches benefit from a network of male collaborators, as can be seen in the letters of Estienne Pasquier, and the dedications of Scévole de Sainte-Marthe, and Louis Le Grand. Finally, the third section reveals the power of printers, Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles, and an unnamed editor in reshaping a retrospective image of Coignard as a Christian poet and high ranking widow. They make strategic editorial choices and compose prefaces to shape readers' expectations and stress the utility of her confessional poetry. Moving across and between the four women authors, I find similarities between the ways in which they are presented: they are intellectually and poetically gifted, exceptional, honourable, virtuous, adhere to society's gender norms, and they are accompanied by illustrious men in their intellectual circle. Yet, each writer has a

special quality that sets her apart from the others: Marguerite is an awe-inspiring creature, neither man nor woman; the Dames des Roches have an extremely close maternal-filial bond; Coignard is noted for her deep Catholic piety.

In my exploration of collaborative modesty, I locate a rich set of moves, facilitated by a network of men and women, who create modest identities and, simultaneously provide a layer of invaluable security for my chosen women writers. Certainly, men form a necessary part of this process, however what is striking in this study is an intriguing set of mother-daughter relationships in which daughters protect their mothers' contemporary and retrospective reputations. To differing degrees, they also reveal a desire to play a more active role in the development, production, and reception of their mothers' texts.

This study focuses on four sixteenth-century French women writers, but they should not be thought of as isolated cases of how modesty may be appropriated by early modern women, or of how collaborative modesty may offer women support in print. Indeed, we find in other parts of France other women writers who benefit from the support of male and female figures, and who respond to modesty in similarly complex ways. In Lyon, for instance, Labé famously deploys a highly eroticized discourse in her *Œuvres* which positions itself closely to immodesty.[77] In sonnet 8, images of tears, pleasure, passion, and pain evoke a bittersweet rapture which chains her female persona:

> Je vis, je meurs: je me brule et me noye
> J'ay chaut estreme en endurant froidure:
> La vie m'est trop molle et trop dure.
> J'ay grans ennuis entremeslez de joye[.][78]

Approximately a decade earlier, a fellow member of the poetic circle, the *École lyonnaise*, Pernette du Guillet is made known to the public by the joint effort of editor, Antoine du

[77] Mireille Huchon's contention that Labé was a literary persona invented by a group of male *Lyonnais* writers, whatever its merits, still allows for Labé to be read as responding to modesty and participating in collaborative modesty. See Mireille Huchon, *Louise Labé. Une créature de papier* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2006).
[78] Louise Labé, 'VIII', in *Œuvres complètes: sonnets-élégies, Débat de folie et d'amour, poésies*, ed. by François Rigolot (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1986), ll. 1-4, p. 125.

Moulin and her husband. Her *Rymes* both conceal and reveal a chaste and forbidden love for a man that is not her husband, Maurice Scève, which at times, manifests itself as erotic love, lifting the veil from the naked female body and revealing feelings of jealousy and pleasure.[79] Inserted in both women's physical texts, we find the dedications of various poets and writers which accompany and protect the women that they honour: Louise's deep beauty and objectification is present throughout; du Guillet is unanimously presented as 'vertueuse, gentile, et toute spirituelle'.[80] While there is no mother-daughter relationship to be found, du Guillet benefits from her husband's influence; he is said to have found and published her works posthumously, expanding the analogy of family links in collaboration, in line with Kenny's notion of the 'family function'. Conversely, we notice Labé's efforts to form a sisterhood with Clémence de Bourges in her dedication, extending the limits of what collaborative modesty can encompass and how it manifests itself.

As noted above, my study forms part of a quest to expel the myth of the 'male genius', to help to dismantle the notion of solitary authorship by offering a more complex understanding of the production of authorship which is collaborative; it features a whole host of participants from various locations, including editors, printers, and daughters. I also shed light on collaborative modesty as a means of negotiating the transition of a woman writer's works into print. My study equally affords women a vital stake in the realm of writing and publication: neither subversive nor submissive, but exploring forms of agency located in between these extremes, and in so doing they move beyond what Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank have described as 'binarized, highly moralistic allegories of the subversive versus the hegemonic, resistance versus power'.[81]

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[79] See Pernette du Guillet, *Rymes*, ed. by Victor E. Graham (Geneva: Droz, 1968).
[80] Antoine du Moulin, 'Aux Dames Lyonnoizes', in Guillet, *Rymes*, p. 1.
[81] Eve K. Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 110.

If we are to re-evaluate our understanding of early modern women's writing and gender, as well as authorship more broadly, we must account for the nuanced moves that women writers make within and beyond the constraints of context. As a concept imposed on women, but re-worked and re-deployed by them to their own creative advantage, modesty – perhaps especially in its collaborative mode – is a category that will shed important, revelatory light on precisely such nuances, and such moves.

Chapter 1: Marguerite de Navarre: Chastity, Choice, and The Court in Early Sixteenth-Century Nérac

Introduction

This study of modesty in sixteenth-century French women's writing begins with a figure who has been proclaimed the 'Mother of the Renaissance'.[1] As the daughter of a nobleman she was granted a traditionally 'male' humanist education that was generally inaccessible to women.[2] The predominant image of Marguerite remains that of a remarkable female with great political power, religious zeal, and a well-established (if largely posthumous) literary career.[3] Unlike the other women in this study, she exercised an important political role during the early half of the sixteenth century, as the Queen of Navarre, and Princess of the French monarchy. Marguerite willingly stepped into public life for her brother, the King of France, François I, as a personal adviser and diplomat.[4] While scholars have explored many aspects of her life as a political and literary contributor, she remains to many 'a charming enigma'.[5] As well as paying new attention to works beyond *L'Heptaméron*, to poetry and theatre published within her own lifetime, recent scholarship has also focused on Marguerite's patronage, empowerment, and investigation of women.[6] The critical

[1] See Patricia F. Cholakian and Rouben C. Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[2] Hilda Dale, 'Introduction', in Marguerite de Navarre, *The Prisons of Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. by Hilda Dale (Reading: Whiteknights Press, 1989), pp. vii-xix (p. x).
[3] Kirsi Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 152. See Lucien Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane: autour de l'Heptaméron* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), p. 17; Pierre Jourda, *Une princesse de la Renaissance: Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1932), p. 226; Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory', 5.
[4] Dale, 'Introduction', p. viii.
[5] Régine Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite de Navarre (11 April 1492-21 December 1549)', in *Sixteenth-Century French Writers*, ed. by Megan Conway, Dictionary of Literary Biography, 387 vols (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1978-2021), CCCXXVII (2006), pp. 269-83 (p. 20).
[6] For example, see Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

assessment has not been straightforwardly positive. Whereas Émile Telle argues that traces of gender issues in her works merely form part of her more important religious aims, Nancy Frelick questions the now celebrated (proto-)feminist stance in *L'Heptaméron*, highlighting an uncertainty regarding Marguerite's eagerness to examine the subordinate condition of women in patriarchal society.[7]

The tendency to perceive Marguerite's secular theatre as inferior to her more well-known *L'Heptaméron* has discouraged many from pursuing a more in-depth examination of the plays. Even those who have worked with them, such as Régine Reynolds-Cornell and Pierre Jourda, have criticized Marguerite's use of supposedly 'one-dimensional'[8] characters and a style which is 'pauvre, incolore, banal'.[9] These judgements distract attention away from the striking moments of female agency that are located in these texts. Notably, the *Comédie des quatre femmes* addresses female agency by way of a discussion of the virtues of modesty and chastity grasped as a question of choice within love. Despite the richness of this play, the majority of scholars have not granted it much consideration.[10] In this chapter I hope to show that the *Comédie* revises inherited and established discourses of modesty, which allows Marguerite to forge a place for herself in what Kelly characterizes as a '400-year-old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics'.[11]

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[7] Émile Telle, *L'Œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, Reine de Navarre et La Querelle des Femmes* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 358; Nancy Frelick, 'Female Infidelity: Ideology, Subversion, and Feminist Practice in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 56 (2001), 17-26 (p. 17).
[8] Régine Reynolds-Cornell, 'Silence as a Rhetorical Device in Marguerite de Navarre's *Theatre Profane*', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17.1 (1986), 17-31 (p. 17).
[9] Jourda, *Une princesse*, p. 226.
[10] The only in-depth studies that I have found are Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, 'L'expression lyrique de la passion dans la *Comédie des quatre femmes* (1542) de Marguerite de Navarre', *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance*, 46 (1998), 25-45; Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, 'La Place de *la Comédie des quatre femmes* de Marguerite de Navarre (1542) dans le discours sur le célibat volontaire comme modèle de félicité de l'Arioste à Gabrielle Suchon', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 26.4 (2002), 113-39; Scott Francis, 'Marguerite de Navarre and Jeun de Meun's "vieil langage" in the *Comédie des quatre femmes* and the *Heptaméron*', *French Forum*, 42.3 (2017), 425-39.
[11] Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory', 5.

In my exploration of the *Comédie*, I argue that Marguerite constructs a commentary on modesty which is linked to the question of choice. She establishes a discussion about what a woman could be and what she could possibly achieve in light of the highly restrictive and feminized notion of modesty, without formally attaching herself to one specific ideal. This is not a sign of being non-committal; she provides a variety of possibilities for women who may contemplate these for themselves. A number of different audiences engaged with the play, especially during a performance in 1542 which included female family members, courtiers, and notable male royal figures, all of whom could take something different from questions and themes that were raised. The court of Nérac promotes a culture which Marguerite implements in her staged debates; each character operates in a courtly setting and represents a courtier's viewpoint. Marguerite in this way intertwines a woman's choice with different theories of female desire, independence with and without love, and she highlights the superiority of women in their dedication to chastity, for themselves and for God, and not for men.

These preliminary thoughts are taken up by moral writer Gabrielle Suchon, in the next century, who further develops chastity as an honourable pursuit which may offer women their God-given right to freedom. While Marguerite may seem rather conservative in her unwillingness to tear down patriarchal society, as if to reinforce the social requirements of modesty, we nonetheless find in her work a rich set of moments, which demonstrate women's freedom to manoeuvre within the confines of their roles. These moments of female agency emerge in the context within which the *Comédie* was developed and circulated. Certainly, Marguerite's place in print is endorsed by the support of men; however, behind the scenes also lies her daughter, Jeanne, a key player in collaborative modesty. She has been recognized as playing a part in the editing, printing and reception of *L'Heptaméron*, in collaboration with translator and editor, Claude Gruget, all of which will

be addressed here and partly in Chapter 4, which brings men into the conversation of collaborative modesty. In this chapter, I focus first, and briefly, on Jeanne's now much-commented influence on the subject matter of *L'Heptaméron* in terms of a cross-generational debate about women's agency, and then, more substantially, on her much lesser known contribution to the composition of the *Comédie* in light of her controversial marriage. These two instances of something like collaboration reveal a strong desire to preserve her mother's modest reputation and provide a space for her to examine a woman's place and potential in society.

I.i. Politics and Place, Mothers and Daughters: From *L'Heptaméron* (back) to the *Comédie des quatre femmes*

Marguerite was no stranger to the presence of modesty in a woman's life. Throughout her lifetime and later into the sixteenth century, numerous conduct manuals prescribed a definition of modesty which served to constrain women not only in their actions, but also in their thoughts. Male conduct manual writers were preoccupied with preventing women from becoming and, more importantly, being perceived as immorally loose. This notion of perception was integral here, for it was the concealing and revealing of the body in front of the eyes of others which led to a woman's (im)modesty. In Marguerite's *L'Heptaméron* we locate a few instances in which she discusses modesty in this way. In novella 11, modesty is alluded to when Madame de Roncex is humiliated by revealing her naked buttocks to the men of the court. She cries out for help having accidentally sat down in excrement at the monastery of the Grey Friars: '[J]e suis perdue et deshonorée!'[12] When her chambermaid, La Mote, calls for help, men of the town come rushing in to the latrines and find Roncex in a compromising situation: '[les hommes] la veirent nue au pire estat qu'une femme se

[12] Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, ed. by Nicole Cazauran (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 165. In this thesis, I use Claude Gruget's edition of *L'Heptaméron* as this provides interesting areas of exploration regarding the collaboration between Gruget and Jeanne d'Albret.

pourroit monstrer.'[13] Behind the light-heartedness of such a comical tale lies a more serious issue with a woman's loss of honour.[14] The exposure of her body parts to the male gaze creates scandal; the public eyes undress her body just as much as she has already undressed herself. In other moments, Marguerite explicitly uses the term *pudicité* as a marker of a woman's chastity. In novella 32, a noblewoman loses 'l'honneur de la virginité et pudicité' due to her affair with a lover who was later killed by her husband.[15] In both novellas, modesty is linked with social concerns. The public and verbal revelation of the two incidents is what makes the immodest incidents known. A woman's immodesty is thus imposed on her when the act of disclosure has taken place; otherwise the immodest act remains hidden behind a veil of modesty and secrecy.

As is well known, in the early modern period marriage was an important strategy of state building, expansion and conquest.[16] It was usually arranged by different political figures, who were invested in this institution as a way to solidify property and inheritance rights.[17] Women were perceived as currency, embroiled in conjugal ties as inheritable goods; they maintained the honour and prestige of their families, as well as peace between different states.[18] It was an accepted reality; duty was placed above desire, a concept with which Marguerite was all too familiar. She was married twice for political interests: firstly, aged seventeen, to Charles duc d'Alençon to settle a dispute between the houses of Angoulême

[13] Ibid., p. 166.
[14] For scholarship on novella 11, see Patricia F. Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in the Heptaméron of Marguerite de Navarre* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 105-16; Laurel Hendrix, 'Reclaiming the Ornament of Wit: Laughter and the Double Standard of Honor in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*', *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor*, 18.1-2 (1998), 62-71 (pp. 62-67); Dora E. Polachek, 'Scatology, Sexuality and the Logic of Laughter in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 33.1 (2002), 30-42; Emily E. Thompson, 'Commodities and Commodes in the French *Nouvelle*', in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology*, ed. by Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 56-65.
[15] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 356.
[16] Carla Freccero, 'Voices of Subjection: Maternal Sovereignty and Filial Resistance in and around Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron', *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 5.1 (1993), 147-57 (p. 150).
[17] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 291.
[18] Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 278.

and Alençon; secondly, to Henri, King of Navarre, which marked a significant phase in the conflict between France and Spain.[19] More salient still to my discussion here, the first marriage of Marguerite's own daughter was far from smooth sailing.[20]

Among the most significant recent critical debates concerning the question of agency, marriage, and immodest behaviour in *L'Heptaméron* are those which connect novellas 21 and 40 – the tales of Rolandine and her aunt – both narrated by the fictional character Parlamente.[21] In these tales, Marguerite employs her relationship with her daughter, as a means to explore questions of duty versus desire, the state versus the individual, and parental authority over filial agency.[22] As we will see in more detail below in respect of the compositional context of the *Comédie*, these questions are born out of her own concerns following Jeanne's tumultuous marriage to Guillaume, duc de Clèves. Caught between the societal dictates of filial obedience in royal matrimony and Jeanne's own desire for freedom, Marguerite uses her writing as a means of mediating between the two.[23] She narrativizes, theorizes and reworks the complicated relationship between parent and child to find a compromise which awards Jeanne opportunities for momentary emancipation which she could not fully achieve her in real life. Indeed, within a tradition of women writing about women, we find the beginnings of an inquiry into the roles of mothers and daughters, encompassing questions of authority and agency. These *topoi* resurface as a literary

[19] Carla Freccero, '1527 Marguerite de Navarre', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier, Howard R. Bloch, Peter Brooks, Joan DeJean, Barbara Johnson, Philip E. Lewis, Nancy K. Miller, François Rigolot, Nancy J. Vickers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 145-47 (p. 146).
[20] Patricia and Rouben Cholakian provide an in-depth account of the events leading up to and during Jeanne's marriage to the duc de Clèves. See Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, pp. 207-41. See also Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', pp. 278-79; Jourda, *Une princesse*, pp. 159-71.
[21] See Carla Freccero, 'Rewriting the Rhetoric of Desire in the Heptameron', in *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France*, ed. by Marie-Rose Logan and Peter L. Rudnytsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 298-312; John D. Lyons, 'The Heptaméron and the Foundation of Critical Narrative', *Yale French Studies*, 70 (1986), 150-63.
[22] Carla Freccero has studied extensively the mother-daughter relationship in novellas 21 and 40. See Carla Freccero, 'Rewriting the Rhetoric', pp. 298-312; Freccero, 'Voices', 147-57; Freccero, '1527', pp. 145-47.
[23] Freccero, 'Rewriting the Rhetoric', p. 303.

commonplace in the following century with the arrival of the novel, for instance, with works such as Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, a novel which highlights a complicated mother-daughter relationship as a medium through which women found a voice. This genre becomes 'a matter not of fathers and sons but [now] of mothers and daughters.'[24]

Novellas 21 and 40 encompass conflict within a parental-filial relationship which is staged in relation to the conjugal interests of the state; in other words Marguerite 'articulates conflicts between state and subjects as a matter of mother/daughter politics.'[25] Both novellas rework the struggle between public duty and personal desire, or more specifically, the circumstances surrounding Jeanne's own complications with monarchical expectations. We find this in novella 40 with the description of the count's authority; he decides on the status of his sister's marriage as a representative of the state. Indeed, he does not want his sister to marry, 'de peur de l'estranger, et par trop aimer son argent'.[26] The count understands marriage as symbolic of economic and political exchange. Similarly, in novella 21, the Queen and Rolandine's father represent the authority of the state:

> [L]e pere amoit tant son argent, qu'il en oublioit l'advancement de sa fille. Et sa maistresse […] luy portoit si peu de faveur, qu'elle n'estoit point demandée de ceux qui se vouloient advancer en la bonne grace de la Royne.[27]

These actions call to mind François I's own self-interest in marrying Jeanne and Clèves. Just like the protagonists, Jeanne is a pawn who is useful for his growth in power and wealth. Here, Marguerite outlines the challenging context within which she once found herself and the requirements to which maternal authority must submit in early modern France. Like

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[24] Ibid., p. 311. Timothy Hampton also discusses this relationship, see Timothy Hampton, 'Narrative Form and National Space: Textual Geography from the *Heptaméron* to *La Princesse de Clèves*', in *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 109-49.
[25] Freccero, 'Voices', p. 154.
[26] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 393.
[27] Ibid., p. 251.

Jeanne's own struggle against her family, the protagonists seek their own freedom of thoughts and feelings. According to the storyteller in novella 40, the sister remains virtuous for years, 'vivant treshonnestement en la maison de son frere', however her desire for a gentleman, who lives in her brother's household, distracts her from her family duty.[28] Dramatic tension arises between individual passion, on the one hand, and family honour and the social order, on the other.[29] The gentleman is a problematic character; he is below his beloved's station in rank and is thus cast at the Other. Later in time, Rolandine repeats the cycle. Her love for a 'gentilhomme bastard' is unacceptable in the eyes of the law because he is a 'marginal figure'.[30] As her governess tells her, 'chacun en seroit scandalisé' by the thought of her talking about a man who 'n'estoit si riche pour l'espouser'.[31] The protagonists choose to act on an illicit love; they mirror the rebellious nature of Jeanne's own attempts to refuse to marry Clèves, as a transgression of 'the laws of parental consent and class'.[32]

Within this framework of rebellion, we find opportunities for empathy, which suggest that Marguerite offers her daughter an olive branch in the literary realm. Since most scholars contend that the composition of *L'Heptaméron* was most likely begun around 1545, Marguerite's act of compromise follows Jeanne's marriage to Clèves in 1541, as well as the probable performance of the *Comédie* in 1542. We see this act in the naivety of the protagonist's actions in novella 40. The sister truly believes that she and her lover will be forgiven for their choice to marry: 's'ils se merioient ensemble, on leur perdonneroit aisément.'[33] Their transgression is seen as blind and foolish by the narrator, as opposed to malicious and conniving. Moreover, when the count discovers the couple in bed, they are

[28] Ibid., p. 394.
[29] Freccero, 'Rewriting the Rhetoric', p. 308.
[30] Ibid., p. 305.
[31] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 252.
[32] Freccero, 'Rewriting the Rhetoric', p. 305.
[33] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 394.

described sympathetically as 'les deux pauvres aveuglez d'amour'.[34] In novella 21, empathy is awarded to Rolandine in her quest to seize back control from maternal dictatorship.[35] Upon the Queen's fervent refusal of the marriage, Rolandine empowers her choices:

> [J]e n'ay eu advocat qui parlast pour moy, sinon la verité, laquelle moy seule sçay, je suis tenuë de la declarer sans craincte […] Je ne crains que creature mortelle, entendant comme je me suis conduicte en l'affaire dont l'on me charge, me donne blasme, puis que je sçay que Dieu et mon honneur n'y sont en rien offensez.[36]

Scholars have rightly found in this formal and assertive speech – the key terms of which are anticipated, as we shall see below, in the *Comédie*– striking similarities with the fifteen-year-old Jeanne's legal claims to her own agency in 1545:

> [Le] marriage que l'on veult faire de moy au duc de Clesves est contre ma volunté; que je n'y ay jamais consenti et n'y consentiray, et que tout ce que je y pourray faire ou dire par cy-après, dont l'on pourroit dire que je y auroie consenti, ce sera par force, oultre mon grey et vouloir, et pour craincte du Roy, du roy mon père et de la royne ma mère, que m'en a menassé et faict foueter par la baillyve de Caen, ma gouvernante, laquelle par plusieurs fois m'en a pressée par commandement de la royne ma mère, me menassant que, si je ne faisois, au faict dudit mariage, tout ce que ledit Roy vouldroit et que si je ne m'y consentoie, je serois tant fessée et maltraictée que l'on me feroit mourir, et que je seroie cause de la perte et destruction de mes père et mère et de leur maison; dont je suis entrée en telle craincte et peur, mesmement de la destruction de mesdicts père et mère, que je ne sçay à quy avoir recours que à Dieu[.][37]

Without completely justifying her daughter's act of disobedience Marguerite offers her fictive Jeanne a way of justifying her freewill and retaining her honour as a modest woman. This careful balance between conservatism and rebellion is a collaboration between mother and daughter which allows maternal authority and a 'rebellious female subject' to co-exist.[38]

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[34] Ibid., p. 395.
[35] Carla Freccero, 'Patriarchy and the Maternal Text: The Case of Marguerite de Navarre' in *Renaissance Women Writers: French Texts, American Contexts*, eds. by Anne R. Larsen and Colette H. Winn (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 130-40 (p. 138).
[36] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 266.
[37] See Jeanne D'Albret, 'Protestation de Jeanne d'Albret', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Nouvelles lettres de la reine de Navarre adressées au roi François Ier, son frère*, ed. by François Génin (Paris: Jules Renouard et C^{ie}, 1842), pp. 291-92.
[38] Freccero, 'Patriarchy', p. 136.

Unlike Rolandine, Jeanne's marriage was later annulled 'on the grounds of nonconsent'.[39] Although, as we find out later on, Rolandine herself can also be reintegrated into the social order due to the death of her husband. Rolandine's moment of agency is perceived as an error of judgement which creates temporary disgrace for her family. By marrying again, to a man who is perceived as 'fort sage et vertueux',[40] she is ultimately rewarded by parental authorities: 'Ainsi elle fut heritiere d'une bonne et grosse maison, où elle vesquit honorablement et sainctement[.]'[41] This legacy enables her to benefit from the family name which she once endangered. The ending is symbolic of a compromise made between Marguerite and her daughter, who risked ruining the reputation of the house of Navarre.

Jeanne's influence on *L'Heptaméron* is fundamental: her name in Gruget's dedication becomes a stamp of approval of female companionship in print, and her experience serves for her mother as a resource for the fictional exploration of their difficult dynamics in a world which seeks to constrain female agency. This sense of the mother-daughter, cross-generational experience as a resource for collaboration, is not, however, only found in *L'Heptaméron*. Jeanne's mediation in the collaborative framework with her mother truly begins with the composition of the *Comédie*, when she was just twelve years of age. Her tumultuous marriage firstly inspires the play's existence and performance, at a moment when Marguerite was caught in an 'international tug-of-war' between her brother François and her husband, Henri d'Albret.[42] Within the context of the performance of the *Comédie*, most likely took place in 1542, we locate a number of historic factors which encourage Marguerite to compose the play as a different kind of peace-keeping gift.[43] In the midst of

[39] Carla Freccero, 'Queer Nation, Female Nation: Marguerite de Navarre, Incest, and the State in Early Modern France', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 65.1 (2004), 29-48 (p. 37).
[40] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 271.
[41] Ibid., p. 271.
[42] Freccero, 'Queer Nation', 37.
[43] The specific date of the performance of the *Comédie* is not completely certain. In a letter to Henry VIII, William Paget refers to a play that was performed in front of François I and other figures in 1542; from this letter Verdun Saulnier identified this play as the *Comédie* and its composition date as the start of 1542. See William Paget, '128. Paget to Henry VIII', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume*

Jeanne's revolts against the imposition of marriage, Marguerite found solace in a play which could be gifted to François to restore good relations. Following Jeanne's marriage, she and Henri were invited to join François at court.[44] Eager to avoid too much controversy, they might have understood theatre to be an effective means of entertainment. Marguerite performed her play in front of the King and the Cardinal de Tournon, both of whom had been important figures in the marriage negotiations.[45] The decision to have these figures as audience members points to a determination to relieve the court of any last tensions that risked being enflamed by recent events. In this performance, she called on important courtly figures to play the parts. It might have been particularly humorous for the King to have watched his beloved mistress, Madame d'Estampes playing one of its most striking characters, as we shall see: the old, but forthright Vieille.[46]

While Jeanne herself did not feature in the performance, she was the inspiration behind it. The thematic matters of choice in love, desire and marriage tie perfectly with issues that were raised in Jeanne's own objections and desire to take control of her own life. From the context within which the play was composed to its subject matter and first performance, Jeanne plays a role in the production of her mother's work. By way of her marital situation, she takes part in an initiative to restore Marguerite's connections with male figures, notably the King, who can support her place in male spheres of influence, including print. This collaboration of sorts triggers the start of Jeanne's later more consensual involvement in maintaining her mother's reputation. It is with *L'Heptaméron*, printed posthumously, that we perceive a transition from Jeanne's potential inspiration for the

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17, 1542, ed. by James Gairdner and R. H. Brodie, 23 vols (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1862-1932), XVII (1900), p. 55 (26 February 1542); Verdun L. Saulnier, *Théâtre profane* (Geneva: Droz, 1946), pp. 84-85.

[44] Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 278. Jeanne, upon her marriage to the duc de Clèves, shouted at Francois de Tournon who officiated the betrothal ceremony. See Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 221.

[45] Cédric Michon and Franćois Nawrocki, 'François de Tournon (1489-1562)', in *Les Conseillers de François I^er^*, ed. by Cédric Michon (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 507-27 (p. 519).

[46] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 228-31.

composition and performance of a piece to a more direct and determined role in the reworking and subject matter of what will prove to be one of her mother's most well-known *chefs-d'œuvre*.

In the *Comédie*, as in *L'Heptaméron,* Marguerite's literary employment of the debate form, with a number of opposing characters or types, often obscures what might be thought to be her own viewpoints. It makes sense, in pursuing the question of agency, to take into account the political duties that she faced as a member of the French royal family. She was restricted from openly challenging ideas against the accepted patriarchal system over which her family ruled. For one to argue that, as a result, Marguerite deliberately constructed her writing to conceal hidden emancipatory messages about gender is to put a requirement on her to provide a concrete solution to patriarchal oppression which many expect of women writers. Her interest in female agency responds, rather, to a desire to examine female potential, a desire which Marguerite fosters to her readers in turn.[47] Within such a framework, it is clear that her exploration of a heroic form of chastity provides readers with moments in which modesty's reins may be loosened to offer women agency over their own bodies.

I.ii. From Performance to Print: the *Comédie*

In a letter written in Nérac from early 1542, Marguerite discusses a key moment in the composition of her play. She notes, 'Nous y passons nostre temps à faire mommeries et farces'.[48] It is here that we uncover an exciting energy behind a significant number of moves,

[47] The special 2017 issue of *L'Esprit Créateur*, entitled 'Women in the World and Works of Marguerite de Navarre', has recently begun to touch on this aspect of her works. See Judy Kem, 'Marguerite de Navarre and the *Querelle des femmes*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 57 (2017), 1-7.

[48] Marguerite de Navarre, '151. – A M. D'Izernay', in *Nouvelles lettres*, p. 381 (12 January 1542). In disagreement with François Génin, Pierre Jourda believes that the letter was written in 1543. See Marguerite de Navarre, '926. A M. d'Izernay', in *Répertoire analytique et chronologique de la correspondance de Marguerite d'Angoulême: duchesse d'Alençon, reine de Navarre (1492-1549)*, ed. by Pierre Jourda (Paris: Champion, 1930), p. 205 (12 January 1543).

intentions, and practices that shape the *Comédie*. An intriguing starting point to this discovery is the use of the terms 'mommeries et farces', for the courtly festivity of a ball, which ends the play suggests a close interaction between Marguerite's fictional staging and the courtly festivities to which she was exposed, and Olivier Millet views the *Comédie* in its entirety as a 'momerie de Carnaval'.[49] While in its manuscript form the play is described as a 'farce', Marguerite did not give the play a formal title.[50] Nevertheless, the terms of her letter suggest an engagement with the contemporary theatrical genres fashionable in the French court. It is only when Marguerite's play makes the transition into print in 1547 that we see the introduction of the title 'comédie' displace both *mommerie* and *farce*.

Perhaps the greatest advocate of Marguerite's theatre, and the first to call it a 'comédie à dix personnages', Verdun Saulnier notes that the *Comédie* was performed in contemporary royal spheres.[51] Marguerite's own reference to 'y' in her letter alludes to this royal setting: the court of Nérac, within which her play was composed. Her residence was an important space of influence for what I refer to as her 'subculture of modesty'. As a place of lively intellectual and cultural exchange between Marguerite and poets, humanists and religious figures, the court became a place to engage with various points of view.[52] Among the many who attended Marguerite's courtly life salon, the Meaux group of Reformers discussed teachings of Christianity and Neoplatonism with Marguerite; we find these transposed in the discussion in the *Comédie*.[53] Moreover, the play was composed at a time in which the dialogue genre re-emerged in both French and Italian society. As a form of argumentation, its rhetorical nature was attractive to writers who presented their readers with

[49] Evain et al., 'Introduction', p. 149; Olivier Millet, 'Comédie des quatre femmes. Introduction', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Œuvres complètes: IV Théâtre*, ed. by Geneviève Hasenohr and Olivier Millet, 9 vols (Paris: Champion, 2001-2007), IV (2002), pp. 365-79 (p. 366).
[50] Evain et al., 'Introduction', p. 149.
[51] Saulnier, *Théâtre*, pp. 83, 92.
[52] John A. Hamilton, 'The Pearl of Princesses', *Poet Lore*, 44.3 (1938), 240-48 (p. 245).
[53] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 67.

a multiplicity of viewpoints on moral, philosophical, and religious themes whilst maintaining an open-ended exchange.[54] Authors such as Estienne Pasquier, Guy de Brués, Louis le Caron, and Jacques Peletier du Mans presented different viewpoints in their respective 'milieux intellectuels'.[55] Most notably, Pontus de Tyard featured *devisants* in his dialogues about love whose names were inextricably linked to the attitudes that they upheld.[56] Léon Ebreo composed Renaissance love dialogues which incorporated the amorous philosophies of Neoplatonism and Petrarchism, which, again, we find reworked in the *Comédie*.[57] As well as the political and statecraft contexts outlined above, Marguerite writes within the frame of a renaissance vogue for discourse *in utramque partem*, using interlocutors who communicate different theories concerning love, gender, intellectual argument, and modesty.

Crucially, the deictic marker 'y' in Marguerite's letter further points to a royal setting that is captured within a specific moment in time. The play, imagined and composed in Nérac, is given its courtly performance in the region of Paris, at the Cardinal de Tournon's palace.[58] Her employment of the term 'faire' in relation to the *mommeries* and *farces* sheds light on the transition from writing into performance. William Paget, Henry VIII's ambassador to France, possibly attests further to this. In a letter dated the 26th of February 1542, he reveals that a play was performed in front of the Cardinal, François I, and other royal family members and courtly figures, which Saulnier speculates was the *Comédie*:

> The card. of Turnon is restored to favour by Madame d'Estampes and the queen of Navarre, who lately played a farce before him, in which the players were the King's daughter, Madame d'Estampes, Madame de Nevers, Madame Montpensier, and Madame Belley.[59]

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[54] Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. xii, 5.
[55] Eva Kushner, *Le dialogue à la Renaissance: histoire et politique* (Geneva: Droz, 2004), p. 9.
[56] Ibid., p. 8. See also Reinier Leushuis, *Speaking of Love: The Love Dialogue in Italian and French Renaissance Literature*, Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts, 25 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1991-2020), XVIII (2017), pp. 1-14.
[57] Leushuis, *Speaking of Love*, pp. 1, 9. See also Johanna Vernqvist, 'Negotiating Neoplatonism and the *Androgyne* Metaphor in *Heptaméron* 70 and 19', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 57.3 (2017), 93-104 (pp. 93-94).
[58] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 228; Saulnier, *Théâtre*, p. 92.
[59] Paget, '128. Paget to Henry VIII', p. 55.

Behind this courtly entertainment is a further, more revealing political intention on Marguerite's part. The Cardinal was an important member of the French court and was staunchly Catholic; he sought to stamp out any signs of Lutheranism or Calvinism. As Paget's letter notes, the Cardinal had only recently been restored to favour by the King, thanks to d'Estampes and Marguerite. Historians remain uncertain as to why the Cardinal initially lost favour, though the enmity between him and Marguerite was long-standing. In 1530, she openly expressed her contempt towards him as a result of his inability to endorse her wish to retain Navarre for her husband, Henri d'Albret.[60] Furthermore, he had been concerned by her conciliatory approach to Huguenots, and her plea to the King to invite Protestant Philippe Melanchthon to court in 1535.[61] Marguerite herself had only been restored to favour by the King after her and Henri's disapproval of François's decision to marry Jeanne to the Duke of Clèves in June 1541.[62] After a period of tension, the performance of the *Comédie* marked François's willingness for his sister to repair their strained ties, including those with the Cardinal who had been, as noted above, involved in marriage negotiations between Jeanne and Clèves.[63] Paget's letter suggests that Marguerite's performance may have been a peace-making attempt to restore good relations between her family and the still powerful Cardinal.

Although it is not known how well the play was received by others present, it is clear that it was thought useful, or pleasurable enough to have been granted the permission of a performance, and with a note-worthy cast of performers. What is especially important to note here is that d'Estampes and the other female actresses play an active role in the act of

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[60] Michel François*, Le Cardinal François de Tournon: Homme d'État, Diplomate, Mécène et Humaniste* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1951), p. 205.
[61] Gilbert Saulnier Du Verdier, *Histoire des cardinaux illustres qui ont été employez dans les affaires d'Estat* (Paris: Jean Baptiste Loyson, 1653), pp. 260-61.
[62] Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 278.
[63] Michon et al., 'François de Tournon', p. 519.

'faire' of the *Comédie* itself. Indeed, when Marguerite writes about a 'nous' who together engage in the courtly mummeries and farces, she discloses a collaborative network between her and her female actresses. Moreover, within this politically motivated performance, Marguerite's own role becomes significant. By including herself in this 'faire', she is no longer the mere playwright who leaves her actresses to physically act out her play, nor is she an audience member who simply observes. She becomes an active participant in the 'making' of this culture of performance.

As Lucy Rayfield has recently shown, comic theatre was a popular genre during Marguerite's time of writing.[64] This fashionable genre offered Marguerite a courtly audience that would willingly be exposed to her discussions about and thoughts on women. The influence of contemporary Italian performance plays a significant role in her 'making' of the *Comédie*. Inspired by the preoccupation with masquerades, Marguerite depicts her female characters as types or masked figures.[65] Manipulating the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* she creates her own pastime of thinking through storytelling. Just as in *L'Heptaméron*, which takes Giovanni Boccaccio's Italian model of the *Decamerone* (1349-1353) and feminizes it into a more French tradition of storytelling, she examines womanhood by inventing a more feminized space out of early modern Italian theatre. It is a utopian space for setting out theoretical views. Her characters mimic her inventiveness with pastime activities; the women of the *Comédie*, much like the *devisants* of *L'Heptaméron*, engage in storytelling to open up further discussions. Moreover, in *L'Heptaméron*, 'plusieurs autres de la court' share their stories in more developed versions of the female

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[64] See Lucy Rayfield, '*Sur le patron de plusieurs bons autheurs italiens*': *Poetics, Performance and Politics in French Comic Theatre (1540–1580)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2018). See also Virginia Scott, *Women on Stage in Early Modern France: 1540- 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Geoffrey Brereton, *French Comic Drama from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1977); M. A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 2006).

[65] See Vincenzo Pacifici, *Ippolito II d'Este cardinale di Ferrara* (Tivoli: Società Storia e d'Arte, 1984); Armand Baschet, *Les comédiens italiens à la cour de France sous Charles ix, Henri iii, Henri iv, et Louis xiii, d'après les lettres royales* (Paris: E. Plon, 1882).

courtly figures in the *Comédie*.[66] If Marguerite's posthumous work explores a range of themes, including love and gender relations, in her play, the theatrical and courtly space enables a more focused experimentation with ideas about what womanhood *could* look like in its various forms.

Five years after its initial performance the play gained deeper resonance. The prominent printer, Jean de Tournes published the *Comédie* as part of the *Suyte des Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses, tresillustre royne de Navarre*, in 1547 in Lyon, as a second volume following the initial *Marguerites.* The physical placement of the *Comédie* in this volume is crucial; it is inserted just after *Les Quatre Dames, & Les Quatre Gentilzhommes*. The latter draws on the same themes as we find in the *Comédie*, namely love and marriage, and both male and female characters engage in debate. Revisiting these questions in the *Comédie*, Marguerite reworks her different responses to modesty to reflect her preoccupation with debate and discussion in nuanced ways, and to see which one might best communicate her ideas.

Marguerite was the first woman of the French nobility to compile and have printed the plays that she deemed worthy.[67] It is here that we perceive, as noted above, a transformation in the categorization of the work from 'mommerie' or 'farce', into a 'comédie' in print.[68] Published under Marguerite's own wishes, her play expands to the public sphere of publication. The notion of 'faire' in performance extends to encompass the concept of 'faire imprimer': an immodest act for a woman.

This transition from performance to print also makes of Lyon a third 'y' in Marguerite's story, after Nérac and the secondary Paris. This location is telling of Marguerite's connections as a participant in a network of men and women writers. A

[66] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 65.
[67] Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 270.
[68] See Marguerite de Navarre, *Comédie*, in *Suyte des Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses, tresillustre royne de Navarre*, 2 vols (Lyon, 1547), II, pp. 178-211.

booming city which flourished intellectually and was home to around four hundred printing workshops by 1555 and the *École lyonnaise* humanist network, Lyon was the place where de Tournes first printed the play.[69] He was strongly connected to the famous *École lyonnaise* writers, including Labé, Pernette du Guillet, and other members who openly defended women, including Antoine Du Moulin, Marguerite's former valet, and Maurice Scève.[70] He also printed a good many of their works, especially those of Scève and Labé, as well as those of Marguerite's friend and client, Clément Marot.[71] Marguerite frequently visited Lyon; she most likely took part in intellectual discussions with important humanists of the time.[72] The change of location, from Nérac to Paris to Lyon, in the printing history of the *Comédie*, expands Marguerite's 'nous' from the group of female characters to the courtly actresses in performance, finally to a 'nous' which embraces a bigger collaborative network in Lyon with male and female writers and printers.

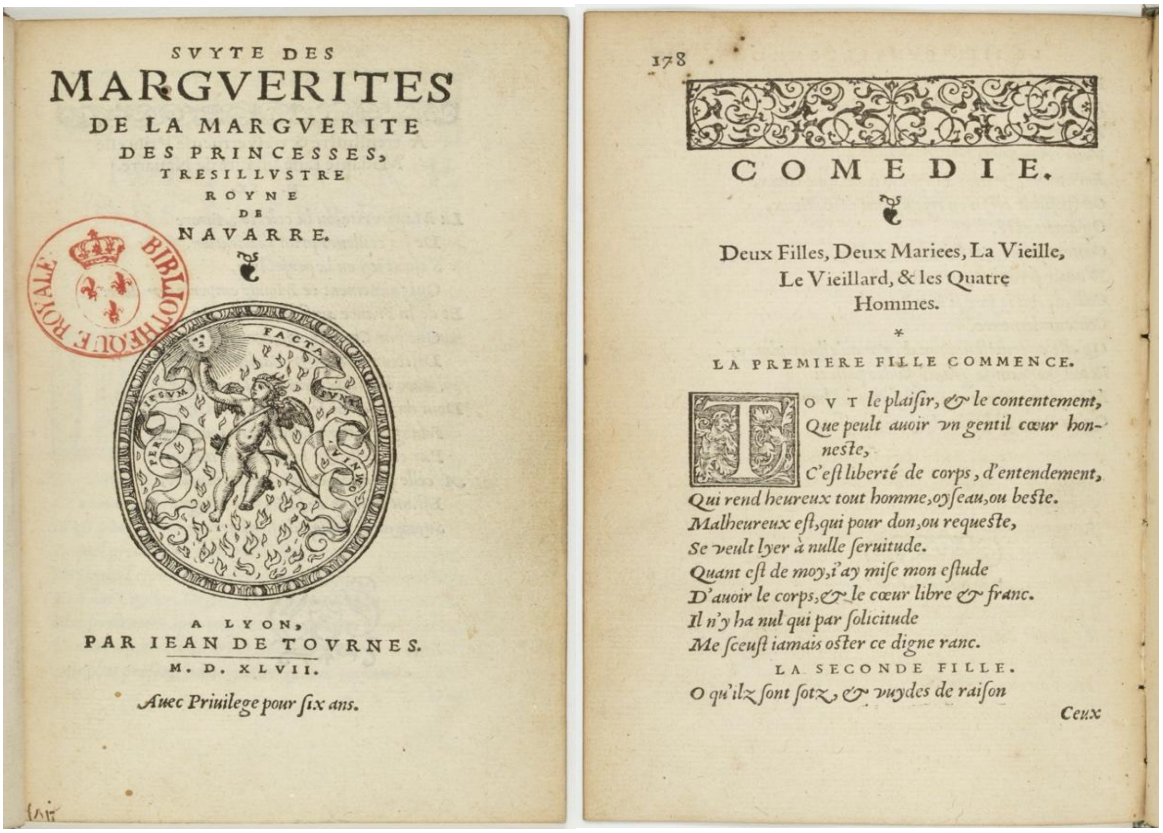
From the re-working of Jeanne's experience, through the work with female actresses in court, to the publication of *Comédie* in Lyon, a new collaboration underpins the play. No longer does the *Comédie* remain a performance in a particular space and time; it becomes a physical object which may be read more than once. The notion of 'faire' in Marguerite's original letter now encompasses a 'faire imprimer et lire' which marks a key shift in the way that her play is perceived. Marguerite's experiments with her daughter's experiences become exemplary; in particular, she sparks a historical line of female role models and creates a companionship between women writers, mothers, and daughters, in different spaces and

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[69] Mercedes T. Ganaza, 'L'Écriture féminine à l'imprimerie lyonnaise du XVI^{e} siècle', *Çédille: Revista de Estudios Franceses*, 22 (2016), 429-45 (p. 431).
[70] Michel Jourde, 'Intertextualité et publicité: publier selon Jean de Tournes', *French Studies*, 65.3 (2011), 315-26 (p. 320).
[71] For a list of works published by Jean de Tournes, see the Bibliothèque nationale de France <http://gallica.bnf.fr/services/engine/search/sru?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.2&maximumRecords=15&query=%28gallica%20all%20%22jean%20de%20tournes%22%29&filter=&page=1> [Accessed 12 June 2019].
[72] Ingrid Akerlund, *Sixteenth Century French Women Writers: Marguerite d'Angoulême, Anne de Graville, the Lyonnese School, Jeanne de Jussie, Marie Dentière, Camille de Morel*, Studies in French Literature, 80 vols (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989-2005), LXVII (2003), pp. 5, 13.

times, but all engaged in acts of collaboration. The acts of writing, performing, and printing are practices which involve a number of people collectively engaged in *passe-temps*, as I will explore further in my fourth chapter, specifically concerned with what I am calling 'collaborative modesty'. For now, it is important to note that the vitality of the context in which the *Comédie* emerges can be further located in this progression from marital politics, to performance, to print; Marguerite's skill and agency is evident not just as the writer of *L'Heptaméron*, but also as a playwright working within the context of experimentation, discussion, and collaboration.

II.i. Love and Marriage in the *Comédie*



SVYTE DES
MARGVERITES
DE LA MARGVERITE
DES PRINCESSES,
TRESILLVSTRE
ROYNE
DE
NAVARRE.

BIBLIOTHEQUE ROYALE

A LYON,
PAR IEAN DE TOVRNES.
M. D. XLVII.
Auec Priuilege pour ſix ans.

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COMEDIE.

Deux Filles, Deux Mariees, La Vieille,
Le Vieillard, & les Quatre
Hommes.

LA PREMIERE FILLE COMMENCE.

TOVT le plaiſir, & le contentement,
Que peult auoir vn gentil cœur honneſte,
C'eſt liberté de corps, d'entendement,
Qui rend heureux tout homme, oyſeau, ou beſte.
Malheureux eſt, qui pour don, ou requeſte,
Se veult lyer à nulle ſeruitude.
Quant eſt de moy, i'ay miſe mon eſtude
D'auoir le corps, & le cœur libre & franc.
Il n'y ha nul qui par ſolicitude
Me ſceuſt iamais oſter ce digne vanc.

LA SECONDE FILLE.

O qu'ilz ſont ſotz, & vuydes de raiſon

Ceux

Figure 1. Marguerite de Navarre, *Suyte des Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses, tresillustre royne de Navarre*, 2 vols (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1547), II, pp. 1, 387. Gallica.BnF.fr.

Modern editions of the *Comédie* divide the play into one act and six scenes. It falls into the category of one of Marguerite's shorter *profane* plays. Despite its now established title, the

play contains five female characters. Two protagonists are married and another two are unmarried. The remaining female character, the Vieille, enters in the middle of the play to witness and mediate the two debates which unfold. For the purpose of this study I will refer to these characters as the first girl, second girl, first married woman, second married woman, and the Vieille. There is an equal gender split between the female characters and five other male characters. The five men, four young men and a Vieillard, take part in the grand scheme of the performance but their roles are miniscule in comparison; they simply facilitate the end of discussions and accompany the women to a ball.

Since the female characters remain in one space for most of the play, it is only at the end that the spectators realize that a ball is happening in another room, most likely adjacent to this. The women seem to be aware of this taking place, for when the men invite them to dance it is assumed that the women happily join them, without any resistance. The secluded space, away from this very public event, becomes a utopian site of experimentation for the women to take time out from the reality of everyday courtly activities. They are fixed in a specific moment in space and time; in this space of conscious contemplation the women may think about women. What is empowering is the theorizing of new ways of living, as opposed to simply giving women a voice. While this is developing in the play, it is unclear what the men are doing. The spectators are never even told if the men are romantically linked to the women or if they are the same men on which the women's experiences are based. During Marguerite's 1542 performance, the actresses were most likely all in one space, directly surrounded by an audience, and standing on flat ground rather than on a raised platform or stage. This staging reflects the play's own fictionalized world; the real-life

actresses, like their theatrical counterparts, generate from within the world they inhabit, their own space of contemplation.[73]

The focus of the debate and discussion is on how in the themes of love and sex, different perspectives are presented according to different generations of women at different stages of their lives. The characters engage in a *débat de société* and present conflicting points of view which the spectators must navigate. *Débats de société* are key features of many of Marguerite's secular plays. In her *Comédie des parfait amants* (1547) a woman wishes to give her hat to crown the most loving person out of three women and a couple. The different characters engage in a debate; they are cast as representatives of various perspectives on what signifies true love. In the *Comédie de Mont de Marsan* (1547) we locate the same preoccupation with debate: a *Sage* reconciles the body and the soul in a debate between a *Mondaine* who favours worldly pleasures and a *Superstitieuse* who preaches the rejection of the body for the divine soul. Alongside the arrival of a *Bergère* who preaches her own view of love, the four women advocate for diverse views. The alternation of different character types reinforces the sense that the *Comédie* is really a platform for intellectual discussion.

This preoccupation with discussion reappears in *L'Heptaméron*. Ten storytellers are obliged to stay in the Abbey of Nostre Dame de Serrance in the valley of Aspe, after a severe flood leaves them stranded. While waiting for a bridge to be built they set up a space to recount and comment on a range of different stories. Mimicking the structure of the *Comédie*, reality simultaneously co-exists with a secluded space, dedicated to theorizing. Due to the incompletion of *L'Heptaméron* it can only be assumed that the *devisants* return to society. What is clear in both texts is the responsibility of the audience. As voyeurs (and

[73] The notion of a platform for theatre only came into being in the 1548 performance of Bibbiena's *La Calandra*. See Maurice Scève, *The Entry of Henri II into Lyon: September 1548,* ed. by Richard A. Cooper (Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997).

auditeurs), they listen to stories and form their own opinions based on what has happened. Like the monks who eavesdrop on the *devisants* of *L'Heptaméron*, Marguerite's readers and spectators of the *Comédie* attempt to decipher what is really happening and analyse the emotions and relationships of the characters.[74]

The spectators of the play cannot relate to the characters as individuals in the same way that they can for the more individual characters of *L'Heptaméron*. However, there is a striking similarity in the ways in which discussions stem from events. In the prologue of *L'Heptaméron*, Marguerite notes that the stories told by the *devisants* are 'veritable[s] histoire[s]', derived from personal experience, that are the foundation of discussion.[75] Actions in the past therefore form part of the thinking process. By the same token, the female characters of *Comédie* use their monologues to communicate their own experiences of love or marriage, which informs their own points of view of those very themes. In Marguerite's world of writing, the micro-narratives of experience shape what she wishes audience members to take from characters' situations and what these lessons might afford women.

The question of womanhood is introduced in the first scene during the dialogue between the first and second girls. While both already occupy the stage, the first girl begins speaking. She launches the first debate which questions the value of love for women and whether or not they should pursue it. Staunch in her decision to refrain from it, she declares:

LA PREMIÈRE FILLE

Malheureux est, qui pour don ou requête
Se veut lier à nulle servitude.
Quant est de moi, j'ai mise mon étude
D'avoir le corps et le cœur libre et franc.[76]

Using the dichotomy between celibacy and independence on the one hand, and slavery and love on the other, she asserts that love equates to enslavement; it is to be avoided at all costs.

[74] Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 282.
[75] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 65.
[76] Marguerite de Navarre, *Comédie des quatre femmes*, in Evain et al., eds, *Théâtre de femmes*, I. 1. 5-8.

Following this fairly short declaration, the second girl intervenes with a wholly opposing viewpoint:

LA SECONDE FILLE

Oh ! qu'ils sont sots et vides de raison,
Ceux qui ont dit une amour vertueuse
Être à un cœur servitude et prison,

[…]

Car qui amour a dans son cœur enclose,
Il trouvera liberté son lien,
Et ne saurait désirer autre chose[77]

She develops a sophisticated argument which combines the concepts of liberty and enslavement. A voluntary servitude reveals a chaste and mutual alliance between two dedicated lovers; love is a prison within which lovers may set each other free. The debate remains temporarily unresolved to introduce two new female characters.

Scene 2 signals the progression from one stage of womanhood to another. Marguerite gives the stage to two older, married women. They facilitate their own debate: who suffers the most in their marriage? The first married woman notifies the spectators that despite being a 'femme honnête et sage' she has been mistreated by her husband.[78] She admits to having a loyal *serviteur,* but she emphasizes her loyalty to her husband and chastity within her marriage. Her husband's paranoia, she states, encourages him to mistreat her:

LA PREMIÈRE FEMME

Il fait grand mal à femme honnête et sage,
Qui craint son Dieu et aime son honneur,
Quand son mari par un méchant langage
Ignorer veut la bonté de son cœur.[79]

Immediately after this revelation, the second married woman interjects with her own story of suffering:

LA SECONDE FEMME

Le désespoir est pire que la mort,

[77] Ibid., I. 1. 11-13, 18-20.
[78] Ibid., I. 2. 48.
[79] Ibid., I. 2. 48-51.

Et jalousie est un vrai désespoir.
Ô foi rompue, et trop apparent tort,
Par vous me faut pis que mort recevoir![80]

This jealousy is not explained until later on in the play. Perhaps due to this ambiguity, the first married woman is unconvinced by her story of suffering. The dialogue is then evenly distributed between the two women who alternate in discrediting each other's experiences. For instance, the second married woman dismisses her interlocutor's pain; she states that it 'n'est qu'au corps', while her suffering is mental and thus more worthy of attention.[81] By the end of the scene we know that the second married woman expresses jealousy towards her husband's mistress who has taken him away from her: 'Il aime une autre, et souffrir ne le puis.'[82] Yet again, intrigue is temporarily stunted to bring characters together.

In scene 3, the two pairs of women comment on each other from a distance. The second girl notices the married women's 'si triste contenance' and wonders what has brought about their distress.[83] Across the room, the married women remark that they are being laughed at: 'Quelle raison fait ces filles tant rire?'[84] The two pairs eventually come together as a cross-generational community of women. The first married woman tells the girls that God is watching them, to warn them for laughing at others. With an equally quick-witted couplet, the first girl transposes the woman's lines back onto her. God is also watching them, she confirms sharply. In this very short exchange, we locate a number of implicit stage directions. The second girl, at the very end of the piece notes that she witnesses the married woman 'pleurant [et] criant'.[85] This tension is diffused when the women reveal to each other their curiosities: why are the married women upset? Conversely, why are the unmarried girls so happy?

[80] Ibid., I. 2. 64-67.
[81] Ibid., I. 2. 75.
[82] Ibid., I. 2. 90.
[83] Ibid., I. 3. 92.
[84] Ibid., I. 3. 93.
[85] Ibid., I. 3. 102.

Marguerite gives the women space to answer these questions in scene 4. This is facilitated by the arrival of the Vieille who represents the final stage of womanhood. She transforms herself into the arbiter of the two debates, which is facilitated by the staging of the play as a trial with the women as defendants. It is this scene which acts as the climax of the *Comédie*. Here, the Vieille draws out the ideas of the four women and then offers her own advice. When she enters the stage, she reveals to the audience her own experience of love:

LA VIEILLE

Vingt ans aimai liberté, que l'on prise
Sans point vouloir de serviteur avoir.
Vingt ans après, d'aimer fis mon devoir.
Mais un tout seul, pour qui seul j'étais une,
Me fut ôté, malgré tout mon vouloir,
Dont soixante ans j'ai pleuré ma fortune.[86]

The four women instantly notice her. In a rapid succession of dialogue, all four discuss the Vieille and take her old age for wisdom; they approach her with the hopes of learning from her 'sage doctrine'[87] and 'très sainte parole'.[88] After her brief exchange with the women, the Vieille claims her place in the debates:

LA VIEILLE

Afin donc que je vous console,
Chacune fasse son devoir
De me dire et faire savoir
Son cas, pour y donner conseil.[89]

In the *Comédie*, Marguerite's female characters contribute to a vision of memory that is based on experience; their narratives move away from the universal towards the particular. Marguerite reinforces this move by inserting the term 'cas' into the Vieille's dialogue, the better to establish the women as narrators of their own experiences. In so doing she problematizes the notion of female exemplarity which she will later explore more fully in

[86] Ibid., I. 4. 109-14.
[87] Ibid., I. 4. 126
[88] Ibid., I. 4. 148.
[89] Ibid., I. 4. 149-52.

L'Heptaméron. As Pollie Bromilow has shown, women in *L'Heptaméron* move away from the 'structures of male-dominated discourse' to show that human behaviour cannot be explained by moral precepts; experience may be more appropriate evidence for debate and discussion.[90] So in the *Comédie*, and most especially in this crucial scene, the women's anecdotal experiences legitimize their arguments. Their judge, the Vieille allots them time to speak, '[p]our mettre ordre sur tout ce fait'.[91] The first married woman is asked to speak first. Building on her previous account, her monologue creates a dichotomy between herself as a virtuous and chaste *femme de bien*, and her husband who is portrayed as jealous and malicious. She notes that while no one can accuse her of 'mal faire,'[92] this does not stop her husband from silencing her: 'Ce fâcheux bien souvent me fait taire'.[93] No matter how hard she tries to clear her name, he treats her like a guilty adulteress.

This first monologue, or 'cas', is followed by the second married woman's equally lengthy account. Beginning with an idyllic image of marital bliss, the short 'Mais quoi?' interrupts the line of verse and points to a rupture which reflects the woman's relationship with her husband.[94] Time has transformed her marriage into a misery: 'Il aime ailleurs: voilà ma mort, ma guerre'.[95] She becomes so overwhelmed with emotion that she prays to God that a lightning bolt will come and either kill herself or the mistress.

The unmarried girls now take over. Their quick, rhyming couplets read like sections of a song. The first girl develops her theory of female independence; through this Marguerite puts forward a third option for women which does not involve marriage or conventual life.

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[90] Pollie Bromilow, *Models of Women in Sixteenth-Century French Literature: Female Exemplarity in the Histoires tragiques (1559) and the Heptaméron* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 176, 179. This draws on a long debate about exemplarity in Renaissance literature. See John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
[91] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 167.
[92] Ibid., I. 4. 181.
[93] Ibid., I. 4. 182.
[94] Ibid., I. 4. 224.
[95] Ibid., I. 4. 230.

Repeating the terms ‘cœur [et] corps’ from the first scene, the first girl emphasizes her independence from the constraints of marriage.[96] She professes her dedication to freedom and chastity; the two are not mutually exclusive, she implies. In contrast, the second girl reclaims the previous idea of madness and projects it onto women who refuse love:

LA SECONDE FILLE

Sans amour, la femme
Est fâcheuse, infâme,
Mal plaisante et folle.[97]

Rejecting the body for the soul, she places her faith in a higher power that can only be found in love. Love is honest and wise, she notes. It can cause pain, especially when she is forced to be away from her lover. However, her duty to this chaste alliance keeps both parties virtuous:

LA SECONDE FILLE

Toujours en lui pense,
Et n’ai contenance
Ni bien qu’à le voir.
Loin de lui, j’écris,
Et en pleurs et cris
Fais bien mon devoir.

[…]

Amour je soutiens
[Être] Cause de tous biens
Jusques à la mort.[98]

Having listened to these experiences, the Vieille uses her platform to speak. Her validation of the women’s experiences is swiftly taken over by a shocking turn. She tells them to be promiscuous. Her eagerness to persuade reflects her own bitterness and wish for revenge after being let down by her love:

LA VIEILLE

Un serviteur si très parfait

[96] Ibid., I. 4. 294.
[97] Ibid., I. 4. 355-57.
[98] Ibid., I. 4. 376-81, 409-11. This viewpoint highlights Marguerite’s preoccupation with Neoplatonism, which Lucien Febvre has studied in his account of her exploration of different presentations of love and her religious views in *L’Heptaméron*. See Febvre, *Amour sacré*.

Il m'a ôté, sans nul répit,
Dont j'ai souffert si grand dépit
Que, soixante ans a, le regrette.
Vieille je suis, mais je souhaite
Souvent le bien que j'ai perdu.
Mon malheur avez entendu,
Qui de mon cœur n'est arraché.[99]

While the other women are still young and beautiful, she argues, they should take advantage of any extramarital relationship that presents itself to them:

LA VIEILLE

Vous ne ferez que tracasser
Cœur et corps, et membres casser.
Le temps, par qui espérez mieux,
Le vous rendra si laid, si vieux,
Que mal vous en contenterez[100]

The women are shocked by her advice; eventually each of them expresses their allegiance to chastity. For instance, the two unmarried girls condemn the Vieille for her suggestion:

LA SECONDE FILLE

Oh! De Dieu soit mon cœur maudit,
Si je crois en votre parole!

LA PREMIÈRE FILLE

Ni moi! Je ne suis pas si folle !
Elle ne produit que malheur.[101]

It is the scene change, occasioned by the appearance of four men and a Vieillard, which interrupts the women in conversation. The men symbolize the fact that reality has penetrated the theoretical space of debate in which women think about women. Scene 5 draws the play closer to the end. The Vieillard approaches the Vieille who informs him that the women have chosen to not take her advice in life. Offering to speak to them himself, he suggests, 'J'y vais parler par tel compas'.[102] As spectators we are never sure if the women decide to take the advice after all. Instead, as the Vieille leaves the stage, we see in scene 6

[99] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 597-604.
[100] Ibid., I. 4. 506-10.
[101] Ibid., I. 4. 627-30.
[102] Ibid., I. 5. 725.

the Vieillard chastens the women – 'Trop grandement vous fourvoyez' – as four young men observe him from a distance and proceed to mock him: while the first jokes that he is feckless and feeble, the second sarcastically suggests that he is there to save the women's souls.[103] It is the fourth man who finally reveals that all along a ball is taking place off-stage. 'Menons-les danser toutes quatre,' he suggests, and soon all of the characters enter the ball and end the *théâtre de cour*.[104] The Vieillard's final comment, 'Or dansons, sans plus y penser' is a testament to the unresolved nature of the play.[105] This quick conversion from debate to light-hearted dancing places emphasis on the theoretical nature of the play, an intellectual, exploratory *passe-temps*, rather than a drama focused on events, characterization, or plot.

II.ii. Managing desire: *Célibat volontaire* and/or Married Chastity

a. La Première fille, la Seconde fille

Marguerite makes use of every opportunity her play presents to examine striking moments of female agency. This is firstly brought about by means of addressing women's choices in life, with specific reference to chastity. Marguerite asks her audience, can chastity be a choice rather than an imposition? She sets this question in motion in the first girl's monologue that begins the play with a debate on love. From her desire to distance herself from love, the first girl challenges the presumption that women, if unimpeded by male influences, will inevitably expose their bodies in immodest ways. She dismisses this claim in her defence of what Dunn-Lardeau has called the 'célibat laïque'.[106] Unlike the other four women in this play, the first girl has deliberately chosen to live without love. She renounces the enslavement of love, in favour of a 'liberté de corps' and of the heart.[107]

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[103] Ibid., I. 5. 733.
[104] Ibid., I. 6. 741.
[105] Ibid., I. 6. 745.
[106] Dunn-Lardeau, 'Place de la Comédie', 119.
[107] Navarre, *Comédie,* I. 1. 3.

The first girl imagines a utopian way of life and presents it to her courtiers who engage with it and sometimes dismiss it. In Marguerite's society, most women's options involved either marriage or joining a convent.[108] But in this testing ground, away from reality, she provides a third, more idealized way of living. While there is no proof as to whether this alternative lifestyle would have been pursued in reality, this does, nevertheless, exhibit a form of agency that a woman could exercise within gender norms of the time. The first girl's refusal to remain silent in such a public space would have alarmed male conduct writers of the time; shocked by her brazenness, they would have questioned her modesty. In order to prove her point, and them wrong, she firstly entertains the widely accepted link between a woman's eloquence and sexual deviance, before revoking it by professing her chastity:

LA PREMIÈRE FILLE

J'aime pureté
De cœur et de corps.[109]

She flees 'peur, et honte',[110] thanks to her virtuous 'liberté honnête'.[111] This firm opinion is later taken up by Gabrielle Suchon in her exploration *Du célibat volontaire, ou la vie sans engagement* (1700).[112] Suchon was a moral philosopher who lived in seventeenth-century France; a former nun who left the convent to pursue 'a studious life' and her own freedom, she was preoccupied with questions of women, most notably their freedom, education and agency.[113] As an author who takes a similar stance to the first girl's theory of womanhood, over a century and a half a century later, Suchon desires the same way of life for women, that is to say a life where women 'vivent sans engagement', away from the societal

[108] Dunn-Lardeau, 'Place de la Comédie', 117.
[109] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 293-94.
[110] Ibid., I. 1. 30.
[111] Ibid., I. 4. 262.
[112] Dunn-Lardeau, 'Place de la Comédie', 114.
[113] Domna C. Stanton and Rebecca M. Wilkin, 'Volume Editors' Introduction', in Gabrielle Suchon, *A Woman Who Defends All the Persons of Her Sex: Selected Philosophical and Moral Writings*, ed. and trans. by Domna C. Stanton and Rebecca M. Wilkin (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 1-51 (pp. 1-2).

constraints of marriage or convent life.[114] Echoing the first girl's argument, she suggests that a woman should remain celibate and live on her own; this practical decision can offer her freedom. According to Suchon, this way of living is sanctioned by God, for secular celibacy upholds innocence and modesty. Chastity is justified by religion itself, for it aims to 'server d'exemple pour gagner les ames à Dieu' and to maintain a woman's honour.[115] When relocated in the early sixteenth century context, and set in relation to the concept of modesty, the figure of the *célibat volontaire* becomes more interesting still. The first girl refuses to act as a slave to men of society and opts for a new lifestyle in which she may have control over her own body. She demonstrates that female independence does not equate to immoral sexual behaviour; she reconfigures modesty to make space for the *célibat volontaire*: a woman who can be both free and chaste. More importantly, she sees this as a duty towards God and not towards society. Modesty is thus no longer a social obligation; it is altered to become a contract between herself and God, in which celibacy ensures the spiritual dignity of a woman.

In both Suchon's and Marguerite's works we find the same terms used to describe women's potential freedom: purity of the soul and the 'liberté du cœur'.[116] Marguerite's argument, however, is not identical to Suchon's. Firstly, Suchon highlights a particularly civic aspect of chastity and a woman's freedom; she highlights the importance of *la vie neutre*, that is to say a woman who dedicates her time to completing various studies, duties and charitable acts.[117] Marguerite is not interested in this in the *Comédie*; there is no suggestion that the first girl should take her freedom into the public arena. Moreover, Marguerite merely contemplates the *célibat volontaire* as a possible role model for women

[114] Gabrielle Suchon, *Du célibat volontaire ou La vie sans engagement*, 2 vols (Paris: Jean and Michel Guignard, 1700), I, p. ii.
[115] Ibid., p. 93.
[116] Ibid., p. 15.
[117] See Gabrielle Suchon, *Du célibat volontaire ou La vie sans engagement*, 2 vols (Paris: Jean and Michel Guignard, 1700), II.

to emulate; it seems unlikely that such a figure in sixteenth-century French society could, in reality, set themselves up as financially independent, or otherwise to afford this alternative way of living. What is key, however, is that Marguerite starts the conversation. Her play can be thought of as a precursor to Suchon's established treatise. Suchon writes from a place in which she defends the way of life that she already leads; there is no question that women can live an 'independent life of the mind' during her time of writing.[118] Marguerite, it seems, had no direct access to such a life herself, but through her work she becomes a model for future writers of the later sixteenth and seventeenth century. Presenting the first girl in the *Comédie* as a bastion of female virtue, Marguerite, like her female successors, firmly dismisses misogynistic stereotypes and suggests that to live freely is not to act immodestly.

Whereas the first girl firmly rejects love as a sign of 'toute servitude', the second girl sees love as an ideal to which everyone can aspire without losing any of the honour associated with modesty.[119] She believes that those who refuse to pursue her ideal, chaste, form of love are 'sale[s] et ort[s]'.[120] Evoking misogynistic discourses, the second girl states that while the male lover simply becomes a 'froide idole'[121] without love in his life, women become 'fâcheuse, infâme'.[122] It suggests that a woman who lives without love develops what later medical writers will call hysteria, a disorder of the womb. Supporting a chaste alliance between two lovers, the second girl shows that it is the only way for people to remain faithful and virtuous. Her argument becomes more complex when she paradoxically states that through the enslavement of the heart one may find freedom and honour. This is particularly important for women whose honour was dependent on loyalty, modesty, and

[118] Domna C. Stanton and Rebecca M. Wilkin, 'Editors' Introduction', in Suchon, *A Woman*, pp. 229-37 (p. 237).
[119] Navarre, *Comédie,* I. 1. 6.
[120] Ibid., I. 4. 365.
[121] Ibid., I. 4. 354.
[122] Ibid., I. 4. 356.

chastity, monitored by the guidance of their husbands.[123] In her monologue we find allusions to grace and light, which conform to commonplaces about love of the time. Renaissance ideals about love as a 'feu' which 'donne lustre et grâce', gesture towards a divine illustration of the power of love.[124] This love reinforces the common requirements of women to be, first and foremost, loyal, and chaste. The second girl complements the views of Reformist thinkers who conversed with Marguerite in her court of Nérac in their exploration of Neoplatonism. Originally inspired by the theories of Plato and developed by Marsilio Ficino, this philosophy of love was one which Marguerite engaged with intensely; indeed she has often been credited for the spread of Platonism in France.[125] According to Ficino's Neoplatonism, an honest love between two people is an expression of supreme beauty, found in God alone. It signifies a rejection of worldly carnal senses for the ascension to a more abstract, perfect love that is transformed into the devotion of God.[126] Marguerite partly owed her instruction of Neoplatonism to the Reformist mentor Guillaume Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux. Through his teachings, Briçonnet emphasized the spiritual marriage between man and woman as a reflection of the divine uniting with human nature.[127]

At first sight, a modern reader of the *Comédie* may be inclined to see this theory as a reinforcement of societal oppression. This lifestyle constructs a woman's status in relation to men; she must be a devoted partner, obedient to the laws of patriarchal society. And the second girl clearly conforms to the views of certain male writers of the time, such as Vives, who stress that a woman's role is to be a wife. She must be restricted by important male

[123] Nancy Frelick, 'Mirroring Discourses of Difference: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* and the *Querelle des femmes*', *French Forum*, 42.3, (2017), 375-92 (pp. 376-77).
[124] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 1. 27.
[125] Michel Bideaux, *Marguerite de Navarre: "L'Heptaméron" de l'enquête au débat* (Mont-de-Marsan: éditions InterUniversitaires, 1992), p. 219.
[126] Pam Morris, *The Role of Women in Politics and Social Life As Viewed by Marguerite de Navarre in the Heptameron and Her Secular Drama* (unpublished doctoral thesis, The City University of New York, 1978), p. 18.
[127] Bideaux, *Marguerite*, p. 223.

influences, and most importantly she must be chaste.[128] Yet, from within this seemingly oppressive portrayal of a woman's vocation in society, we locate a moment of female agency. For the second girl suggests that she and her lover should both commit to leading chaste lives. In this way, their love is presented a pact; a mutual alliance which accentuates loyalty and an equal power dynamic. Notably, the girl's choice to be chaste is a marker of the ability to subtly reconfigure modesty, not as an imposition but rather as an opportunity for autonomy. From her dedication to God, and chastity, she becomes a morally valuable figure. Alongside terms such as 'honnête' and 'sage' she reflects the religious ideals of a *femme de bien*, praised for her purity.[129] Her rejection of the body reinforces her willingness to remain chaste over carnal desires: 'D'amour mon cœur vole'.[130] But it is not her rejection of the body which empowers her; it is her decision to be chaste for God, and not for men. The references to 'grâce' bear witness to this relationship with God.[131] After hearing the Vieille's own advice, she is more explicit about her duty to God:

LA SECONDE FILLE

Oh! de Dieu soit mon cœur maudit,
Si je crois en votre parole![132]

She leaves the body for something higher: the soul. Chastity of the heart is key; it signifies a willingness to form a divine pact between lovers, and between them and God. In configuring her character in this way, Marguerite enables the second girl to appropriate modesty as a symbol of female morality. It is not until the married women are introduced in the debate that we can look back on this scene and truly notice the force of this revolutionary reconfiguration of modesty as a choice.

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[128] Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), p. 196.
[129] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 372.
[130] Ibid., I. 4. 397.
[131] Ibid., I. 4. 349.
[132] Ibid., I. 4. 627-28.

b. La Premiere femme mariée

While Marguerite champions women and locates moments of female agency, she is also aware of the limitations that are placed on them. As we know, the *Comédie* is premised on an interplay between idealism and reality. Modesty is a social reality which is inextricably linked to a woman's honour; we find in the first married woman's monologue an awareness of the dangers that women face in real life, notably the fragility of their reputation. Unlike the unmarried girls, she is tied down by a husband who mistreats her because he believes that she has been unfaithful:

LA PREMIÈRE FEMME
Mais ce mari me fait payer l'amende,
Où je n'ai fait ni péché ni erreur[133]

Her monologue communicates the torture that she suffers at her husband's hands. What is most interesting in these lines is the use of 'péché' and 'erreur', placed in the same line of verse; they have two very different meanings. They reveal a double injustice; firstly, 'sin' adds a religious dimension to the wife's actions. She argues that in the eyes of God, she has remained *pudique*. The reference to a mistake equally casts light on a social aspect of modesty. The mistake to which she refers is an allusion to a scandal, or an awareness of an error made. Thus we find in her justification that she has neither acted on her *serviteur*'s love nor has she broken her silence about the *serviteur* in public. Her need to justify herself in two ways suggests that modesty is both a religious and a social issue. To be immodest is both to commit an immodest act and to talk about it. Moreover, as Emily Butterworth points out in her exploration of scandal in novella 21 of *L'Heptaméron*, the exposure of scandalous, or in this case immodest, behaviour is interpreted as an 'assault on behavioural norms'; scandal itself has a public dimension for it 'needs an audience; it comes into being as a form

[133] Ibid., I. 4. 176-77.

of spectacle' when it is witnessed.[134] If the first married woman violated behavioural norms with an immodest act, and therefore caused scandal, she would be publicly ruined. She tries desperately to preserve her honour by portraying herself as an honest woman without a single 'vice taché' to her name.[135] In fact, if we compare her self-description to contemporary conduct manuals, we find that she identifies herself with the model women who are idealized in such texts. Vives's conduct manual stresses a woman's submission to her husband and the need for her to remain isolated from society.[136] We find this same dedication to obedience in the woman's monologue; she wishes to show that she has preserved her honour through her vow of chastity.

To better understand the significance of this claim, we may be inclined to use Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in which femininity is interpreted as a repetitive cultural performance.[137] Butler uses drag to highlight the concept of imitation which is at the heart of this performativity.[138] With this in mind, the woman upholds a societal value or a norm with which she (either consciously or subconsciously) aligns herself in order to not be chastised as an Other by society. She is an actor on stage, and she is an actor of gender. Butler's theory allows us to see that the married woman's subordination is a performance of social ideals imposed by the patriarchal system. Marguerite's theatre emphasizes this performance; it signifies an allegiance to gender norms. Here, the woman's 'acts, gestures, enactments' are fabricated to give the illusion of an inherent essence of female identity.[139] When these forms of behaviour are repeated, they create a self which makes the 'social

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[134] Emily Butterworth, 'Scandal and Narrative in the Heptaméron', *French Studies*, 72.3 (2018), 350-63 (p. 357).
[135] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 2. 55.
[136] Vives, *Livre*, p. 160.
[137] Judith Butler and Liz Kotz, 'The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler', *Artforum*, 31.3 (2012), 82-89 (p. 84).
[138] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 85.
[139] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 173.

audience, including the actors themselves come to believe' gender to be real.[140] In actuality, this is a form of social control, engrained by the woman's very own fear; she does not want to lose her honour and good reputation. It is difficult to determine an 'I' or a 'we' that has not been determined by gendering, since the 'I' stems from a complex web of differing gender relations, not before or after gendering itself.[141] The woman's identity is therefore constructed in relation to men and patriarchal discourses. Her actions and words point to a metatheatricality which helps the audience to understand her staging of a specific kind of femininity. The second married woman's expression of desire will later provide an alternative discourse of femininity which shows that other identities are possible to achieve.

Butler claims that these gender performances have the potential to be subversive at the same time as they mimic specific societal norms. In an interview with Liz Kotz she states that for a copy or subject to be subversive it has 'to both mime and displace its conventions'.[142] This suggests that for the first married woman to undermine gender norms, she may simultaneously perform specific gestures and emancipate herself from these very norms by negating, upholding, and transcending them. Can we then call Marguerite a subversive playwright after all? A key difference between Butler's theory and the *Comédie* is that the latter contemplates rather than clearly advocates transcending gender ideals. We, as an audience, never know if the women can, or even should, take on different identities in reality. Marguerite creates a fantasy utopian space with which to experiment with different discourses for femininity. Certainly, by combining idealism with realism, she articulates different models of agency, which can, and will be taken up by her readers over time. Nevertheless she is deliberately ambiguous about the achievement of these opportunities beyond the confines of the play *in her own time and place*. As we notice in the first married

[140] Ibid., p. 179.
[141] Butler, *Bodies*, p. xvi.
[142] Butler et al., 'The Body', 84.

woman's monologue, the husband's authority is never truly questioned. It is not his social superiority that is the problem; it is his unfair, unjust accusations. We cannot call this subversive. It seems too defeatist, nonetheless, to argue, as Patricia and Reuben Cholakian do, that Marguerite purposely chose a 'star-studded cast of court familiars […] to do some preaching on love and marriage'.[143] Admittedly, the actresses involved in the 1542 performance were all prominent court figures who were engaged in love, some were married, others' marriages were being arranged, and Jeanne's difficult marriage haunts the play. However, Marguerite declares here, as in the *L'Heptaméron*, a wish to create a *passe-temps* and to use her band of women to explore her experimental ideas, not to dictate how these women should behave. Butler's theory of gender performativity shows us that Marguerite is neither a submissive nor a subversive playwright, and that her work is more than a simple didactic piece 'preaching' one or other view of marriage. She creates, rather, her fictional world as a testing ground for thinking about what life could be for women in an alternative universe; she assesses these choices, but never endorses them as legitimate paths to take. The attention that we, as an audience, award different gender identities demonstrates the importance of the play as an opportunity to contemplate different forms of womanhood within a theoretical framework.

c. La Seconde femme mariée

The setting of the first woman's situation alongside the second woman's experience reveals a double standard in the treatment of men and women in the discourse of modesty. While the two married women are faithful and the second wife's husband is not, in society's eyes it does not matter. Regardless of whether the wives are *femmes de bien* or not, their reputations are in danger and, finally, dependent on the views of men. The first wife tries to

[143] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 228.

halt critics who may accuse her of promiscuity, yet this does not prevent her good reputation from being tarnished. She defines herself as a 'vraye femme de bien'.[144] Phrases such as 'obéir et complaire' portray her as a devoted wife.[145] Conversely, her husband is tyrannical. He is a 'faux menteur'[146] who is associated with the words 'furieux', 'force', and 'malheur'.[147] Her husband has silenced her; to be outspoken would be to lose her modesty. If another man so much as pays her attention, she is subject to the wrath of society. The sad reality is that a woman's reputation is constantly in danger; women should be wary of being in situations which may strip them of their honour. She highlights a discrepancy between the sexes. Moments of female agency are punctured by the reality of a woman's condition in early modern society.

As a fervent Christian, and one operating within the tightly constrained early modern dynastic context, Marguerite supports a chaste alliance in marriage; however, through her examination of the kinds of agency afforded to women at different stages in their lives, she offers women some measure of scope in defining their own bodies. She uses her fictionalized courtly setting to experiment with a theory of female desire within the patriarchal economy of sex. While Carla Freccero asserts that there is a 'frustrating absence of female pleasure' in Marguerite's novellas, we find in her *Comédie* a discrete revelation of bodily pleasures.[148] Indeed, her understanding of the importance of worldly and divine matters alters the power of modesty. This becomes especially clear with the introduction of the second married woman, who proclaims herself to be the woman that suffers the most due to her husband's

[144] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 77.
[145] Navarre, *Comédie,* I. 4. 179.
[146] Ibid., I. 4. 180.
[147] Ibid., I. 4. 186, 188, 191.
[148] Carla Freccero, 'Bodies and Pleasures: Early Modern Interrogations', *Romanic Review*, 86.2 (1995), 379-90 (p. 387).

pursuit of a mistress: 'Il aime une autre, et souffrir ne le puis.'[149] Despite his actions and the pain that she endures, she remains faithful.

Before approaching this, Marguerite firstly contextualizes her theory of desire by comparing male and female experiences of sex. The double standards that lie between men and women are exposed when the second wife reveals her husband's infidelity. In this story, as elsewhere in her work, Marguerite directly confronts some of the fundamental questions of the *Querelle des Femmes,* a debate between writers who focused on the nature, status and role of women in society:[150] male respect for women, a husband's fidelity, and the rehabilitation of marriage.[151] The second married woman's adulterous husband is allowed to indulge in carnal pleasures freely while she languishes in pain. If an early modern wife committed adultery it was a serious crime; she could be placed in a convent for life and lose her dowry.[152] Conversely, a man might pride himself on the ability to engage in sexual conquests.[153] In the *Comédie*, however repulsed an audience may be by the woman's husband, the codes of modesty do not apply to him. Marguerite highlights the irony behind men who preach chastity to their female counterparts and do not serve to uphold these same values themselves. If anything, they try to ruin a woman's honour through sexual conquest.

Out of a distressing story of infidelity, Marguerite opens up a new potential for her sex to partly liberate women from the constraints of modesty. She introduces a female desire that her characters may experience, so long as it is not acted on with another person. Katy Emck has remarked on Marguerite's engagement with desire in *L'Heptaméron*. She contends that her allegiance to chastity is a deflection from a more covert depiction of

[149] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 2. 90.
[150] Pellegrin, '"*Querelle des femmes*"', 71.
[151] Telle, *L'Œuvre*, p. 68.
[152] Ibid., p. 80.
[153] Philip Ford, 'Neo-Platonic Themes of Ascent in Marguerite de Navarre', in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. by Gary Ferguson and Mary B. McKinley (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 89-107 (p. 100).

flirtation and desire.[154] I locate a subtle form of eroticism in the *Comédie*. The second married woman's desire is born out of jealousy towards her husband's lover. She firstly describes the physical impact that her emotions have had on her weak body. Soon after, the extended metaphor of jealousy as a fever is highlighted in her vulnerable state:

LA SECONDE FEMME

Je brûle et ards, je me morfonds, je sue
En fièvre suis […][155]

The feeling of burning refers not only to her rage but also to the pain inflicted on her passions; love is represented as a blazing fire which burns its victim. The first line of verse could be read as a list of medical symptoms, and yet it reveals a more hidden eroticism. Such imagery insinuates a sensual and uncontrollable passion for unrequited love. Marguerite places caesuras after the fourth, eighth and tenth syllables of the line to emphasize the woman's breathlessness. The rhyming couplet of 'sue' and 'tue' triggers a crescendo in this tense situation; it furthers the concept of jealousy, and the seriousness of the potential for her own death. She suffers from a dangerous lovesickness, a disease that threatens her ability to remain a *femme de bien*.[156]

Marguerite presents an alternative form of love which incorporates worldly passions. The sweating, sleeplessness and fever punctuate the *mal mariée*'s monologue and sexualize her chaste body. In particular, her restlessness reveals an intense female sexual desire: 'Toute la nuit sans dormir me lamente…'[157] It resembles the sensuality of Sappho, or even Labé's sonnets in which her female personas express an intense sexual desire.[158] Within the community of women in debate, she openly embraces her painful desire. As long as she does

[154] Katy Emck, *'A Wanton Woman and a Wise': Women Writing about Desire in Renaissance Europe, 1540-1620* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Alberta, 1996), p. 15.
[155] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 258-59.
[156] On Marguerite's exploration of lovesickness, see Judy Kem, *Pathologies of Love: Medicine and the Woman Question in Early Modern France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), pp. 143-66.
[157] Ibid., I. 4. 254.
[158] Dunn-Lardeau, 'L'expression', 38.

not act on this, she may express this without being criticized. Like Labé's personas, the married woman in the *Comédie* takes control of her desires and her personal experience. She speaks for her body and conversely, her body speaks for her. In this manner, Marguerite, 'smuggle[s] pleasure into virtue's temple', creating a tension between chastity and desires of the flesh.[159] Within this tension, her character flees the harmful consequences of shamelessness stipulated by the social code of female honour.[160] It is an immodest means of expression hidden behind a veil of modesty.

Women are not solely the objects of love, as men have perceived them to be. They also 'mettent en scène avec force les aspects physiques et non seulement sentimentaux de leurs désirs.'[161] Nancy K. Miller's analysis of male desire as erotic and female desire as political reinforces this achievement. She notes that a woman, through desire, can elevate herself to the status of subject, and not an object of circulation for men.[162] In the Renaissance Petrarchan tradition of love, women were idealized as the objects of contemplation for male sexual desire, confined by their pedestals as two-dimensional, silent figures.[163] In the *Comédie*, gender roles are reversed. The treacherous husband becomes the object of contemplation; the second married woman is at the top of the sexual hierarchy. Carnal desire and chastity unite, mixing the spiritual and the worldly, the divine and the sexual, the modest and the immodest. Marguerite shows that a woman may incorporate both chastity and desire into her life. And by the same token, we can trace countless examples of the exploration of

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[159] Emck, *'A Wanton Woman'*, p. 55.
[160] Ingrid N. Ray, *Narrating Desire/Desiring Narrative in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1999), p. 6.
[161] Dunn-Lardeau, 'L'expression', 41.
[162] Nancy K. Miller, 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction', *PMLA*, 96.1 (1981), 36-48 (p. 41).
[163] Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*, p. 16.

female desire expressed though erotic imagery in Marguerite's religious poetry, as she channels, redirects, releases, and internalizes her sexual desire as a desire for Christ.[164]

As we see later in the century with Coignard, sensual writing in a religious context could offer women writers a place in print. Such internal expressions of desire also precede what Nicholas Paige has interpreted as an interest in human interiority in seventeenth-century women's devotional literature. 'Being interior' entailed the cultivation of a personal relationship with God, which was based on subjective experience rather than scholastic learning.[165] Women devotional writers were in search of the 'tender and the touching', a more sensual feminized piety.[166] It is a space of agency, but interiority can be a space of alienation. Marguerite represents this tension; the second married woman's interiority is an access to freedom to transform herself into a desiring woman, but this is also a repressive act. The voyeuristic pleasure of the second married woman's interiority is under an obligation of secrecy. This interiority is not necessarily a 'mode of resistance', but rather a chance to have some leverage within the confines of patriarchal society.[167]

Such immodest eroticism becomes more interesting still when coupled with contemporary medical discourses. In English society feverish symptoms, an inflamed body, and the loss of reason were often thought to be manifestations of lovesickness, a woman's disease.[168] Jacques Ferrand's treatise of 1623, *De la maladie d'amour ou mélancholie érotique* also saw it as a disease, stemming from an imbalance of the four humours of the body.[169] In *L'Heptaméron* there are many cases of lovesickness; in novellas 9 and 26 erotic

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[164] See for instance, Marguerite de Navarre, 'Chanson 17', in *Chansons spirituelles*, ed. by Georges Dottin (Geneva: Droz, 1971), ll. 27-29, p. 51; this poem is well discussed in Russell Ganim, *Renaissance Resonance: Lyric Modality in La Ceppède's Théorèmes* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p. 339.
[165] Nicholas Paige, *Being Interior: Autobiography and the Contradictions of Modernity in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 13.
[166] Ibid., p. 68.
[167] Ibid., p. 233.
[168] Lesel Dawson, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.
[169] Ray, *Narrating Desire*, p. 148.

melancholy triggers the death of two individuals.[170] In novella 13, a sea captain lusts after a woman who is not his wife. Fire is said to spread through his heart, he experiences a terrible malady, and sweats profusely. Similarly, in the *Comédie*, the married woman notes that a burning 'fièvre' governs her body.[171] Lovesickness even becomes visually identifiable when the first two girls observe the 'mélancolie' that the married women experience, which further dramatizes the importance of the woman's bodily experiences in her manifestation of desire.[172]

Often medical discourses perceived lovesickness as a descent into madness, incoherent speech, and sexualized behaviour.[173] The married woman's actions, however, challenge this claim. She undermines the widely held view that only male lovesickness can be converted into creativity and an 'elevating understanding of life'.[174] By the end of her distressing tirade, her expression of pain becomes a sign of artistic creativity. As Judy Kem notes about *L'Heptaméron*, a virtuous woman can experience passion but learn to control it and refrain from sexual encounters.[175] In the *Comédie*, the woman's choice to remain faithful to her husband is a sign of her rationality and a conscious decision that she makes, which is informed by her awareness of the more morally superior path to take in life, which is abstinence:

LA SECONDE FEMME

[J]'ai espérance
Que par ma grand' perseverance,
En bref, retournera à moi[.][176]

[170] Judy Kem, 'Fatal Lovesickness in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 41.2 (2010), 355-70 (p. 356).
[171] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 259.
[172] Ibid., I. 3. 99.
[173] Dawson, *Lovesickness*, p. 5.
[174] Ibid., p. 4.
[175] Kem, 'Fatal Lovesickness', 364.
[176] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 698-700.

Having the choice to deceive someone and choosing not to take the opportunity is a sign of a woman's virtue. The second married woman chooses the more morally honourable option of patience but it is never known if her waiting actually works. All we know is that patience, over promiscuity, is another possible course for a woman to take.

Novella 37 of *L'Heptaméron* bears close resemblance to the *mal mariée*'s story. The two women have both been betrayed by their husbands; they choose the long process of waiting over sexual revenge. In novella 37, we can think of the woman as a more developed version of the second married woman. She experiences great jealousy when she finds out about her husband's betrayal. She becomes careless with her housework, and she even watches him in bed with his mistress, setting straw on fire close by as a demonstration of her jealousy. Despite her husband's treachery, she shows him love and care; after a year he then returns to her. *L'Heptaméron* later validates the second married woman's decision. Here, as with the experience of Jeanne's marriage, Marguerite transfers her discussion into her novellas to carry the story onwards. In so doing, she appropriates the ideal type of modesty, honours women, and at the same time grants them autonomy over their bodies. In the *Comédie* we therefore see the beginnings of a discourse of female autonomy in which the woman's patience represents a way for women to be celibate *for themselves*.

d. Deux Filles, Deux Mariées, La Vieille

Heroic chastity is not the only choice for the women in the play. The Vieille provides an alternative way of life which undermines modesty. A shift occurs in the play when the seemingly wise elderly woman suggests to her peers that the way to end their suffering is to be promiscuous. To the first married women she suggests:

LA VIEILLE

Vous qui souffrez mal importable
D'un mari fâcheux et jaloux,
Je vous requiers, apaisez-vous;

[…]

Aussi si votre patience
Ne peut plus endurer, d'un veau
Faites un très plaisant oiseau![177]

Using the animal metaphor of the calf and the bird, she implies that women can play men at their own game. Her advice is not strictly out of care for fellow women; she wishes for personal revenge against the world for the cruelty that love once inflicted on her: 'Amour est un fin et faux ange'.[178] The women are not convinced by her rhetoric; for instance, the first married woman initially rejects the Vieille's suggestion:

LA PREMIÈRE FEMME

Madame, j'aime mieux souffrir,
Et à tourment et mort m'offrir,
Nonobstant sa mechanceté,
Que faire un tour de lâcheté.[179]

If, as Wes Williams suggests, *L'Heptaméron* is an example of what a woman could and did achieve 'given the advantages of her station', the *Comédie* already sets out the questions as to the possibilities open to women; *L'Heptaméron* plays out how women act on these possibilities.[180] Marguerite entertains the prospect of immodesty through the figure of the Vieille to finally defend women's virtuous nature. Since the women refrain from adultery, they take back control of their bodies from the dictates of modesty, and by association, from men. Of course, the main difference between the Vieille and her female peers is that she is no longer having sex while the other women can become promiscuous if they so wish. In 1542, four out of the five actresses who played these characters were married. As for the final actress, Marguerite de France, her royal matrimony was being discussed.[181] The

[177] Ibid., I. 4. 429-31, 439-41.
[178] Ibid., I. 4. 540.
[179] Ibid., I. 4. 458-61.
[180] Wes Williams, 'Marguerite de Navarre: Renaissance Woman', in *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 91-112 (p. 92).
[181] Cholakian et al., *Marguerite*, p. 228.

characters do not follow their real-life counterparts because their fulfilment in the world is not through sex, but rather chastity. Ironically, instead of fictionalizing the women's lives, Marguerite entertains the prospect of women choosing something other than worldly pleasures, either in or outside of marriage. This leaves the audience to ask some fundamental questions: is chastity, and even modesty, a choice or a form of repression? Marguerite uses these questions to experiment with the idea that chastity can offer women autonomy and in so doing to diminish the ideal type of modesty's overwhelmingly constraining power.

e. Danser/tancer/penser

The play's final scene reveals one last striking move on Marguerite's part. When the Vieillard and four other men enter the space, the meaning behind the debate shifts and this all-female fictional space becomes penetrated by men. As the Vieillard speaks to the women, the second man states:

LE SECOND HOMME

Pensez qu'il veut sauver leurs âmes,
Sans que de nous soit assailli![182]

This seemingly harmless joke is a reflection of a joke with her audience. It is a reference to one function of literature, didacticism, which Marguerite wishes to undermine. Here, the term 'assailli' connotes an attack; this courtly rhetoric of assault reinforces exactly what the women have spoken about before the men's arrival into this space. It suggests that male ambitions lie in sexual conquest; their intentions are to put a stop to the debates and to besiege the women's chastity. Building on this, the third man firstly draws a parallel between 'danser' and 'tancer':

LE QUATRIÈME HOMME

Menons-les danser toutes quatre,
Et vous les verrez bien tancer![183]

[182] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 6. 737-38.
[183] Ibid., I. 6. 741-42.

Here, this pun signifies a relationship between dancing and disputing. Beyond this utopian space, he declares that the women will continue to engage in debate at the ball and the Vieille and Viellard will continue to try and lecture them. However, this idea is quickly interrupted:

VIEILLARD

Tancer, non! Mais, bien vous combattre
Ma vieille et moi de bien danser.[184]

The Vieillard tries to put an end to the debates by focusing on the ball. Dancing represents light-hearted entertainment that forbids the women from continuing with their serious discussion; it becomes a more strategic means for the elders to dominate the space. Moreover, when the Vieillard continues by affirming, 'Or dansons, sans plus y penser',[185] he adds a new term into the mix; 'penser' is something that he wishes the women to no longer take part in. It is a way to 'rebattre' the women's 'orgueil',[186] in other words, for men to keep them in place.

Why does Marguerite end with this? Does she award men the last word? Does she equally show how men unfairly take over the space? Or does dancing as a joint activity suggest in some way that men and women can speak together? Staying true to her preoccupation with experimentation and discussion, she offers different meanings according to the various audiences that engage with the play. If we revert back to the *Comédie*'s 1542 performance, we are inclined to see the play as a form of *divertissement* for the King and his peers. However, the play takes on more resonance for the women of the court, especially Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne, who plays a fundamental role in its composition. These women, and the next generation of female writers, view the *Comédie* as symbolic of the set of opportunities open to them which they may not have thought possible.

[184] Ibid., I. 6. 743-44.
[185] Ibid., I. 6. 745.
[186] Ibid., I. 6. 746.

Since Marguerite's theatre pre-empts questions that are further addressed again in *L'Heptaméron*, it is no surprise that likewise the *Comédie* ends without any real solution to the discussions that take place. The ladies return to the ball, dropping the debates. Critics have declared this technique to be static and underwhelming.[187] However, this ball is a significant part of Marguerite's courtly subculture of modesty. It represents the entertainment that comes out of experimenting with different female life choices. The play is a performance, and the characters are themselves performers, like the dancers which were received at Nérac. This courtly narrative is a testament to Marguerite's aims; she serves to reveal the unjustness of a woman's condition, against which neither she nor other women may explicitly revolt. Nonetheless, she opens up spaces of agency, in which a different, utopian life may be accessible to women. She paves the way for future writers, who take up their pens both to address these same choices, and for herself in her later *L'Heptaméron* to further unfold her ideas and to challenge modesty's reign in early modern society.

As I have stated, this notion of a community of women that appears in Marguerite's story is fundamental to ways in which we as readers both understand her and the other women writers in this study. The most striking form of female companionship that we see playing out in the lives of all of these women writers is the mother-daughter collaborative network which further complicates our perception of early modern women's texts in this period and the context within which they were composed, published, and received. Moving from a micro to a more macro understanding of their commentaries on modesty, the transition from manuscript to print reveals interesting questions about authorship, collaboration and the significant role that particular daughters have played in shaping their mothers' position and modest images in print. Evidently, the support of men is needed for

[187] Josephine Donovan, 'Women and the Framed-Novelle: A Tradition of Their Own', *Signs*, 22.4 (1997), 947-80 (p. 964).

mothers to be in print, as we explore in Chapter 4, however Jeanne d'Albret, Catherine des Roches, Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal highlight the ability for daughters to not simply provide material or inspiration for their mother's work, but equally to intervene directly in literary collaboration.

Conclusion

Marguerite is an example of a woman writer who thinks about women, in Joan Kelly's terms, and asks the 'What if?' question. She imagines new possibilities for them and in doing so she weakens modesty's hold in society. Specific references to themes treated more extensively in *L'Heptaméron*, namely women's agency through choice, transform the *Comédie* into an early testing ground for Marguerite. From such explorations, she becomes a *resource* for later women writers who treat similar themes in their own texts.

Not least among these is her daughter Jeanne who became a forthright Protestant leader, writing fire-fuelling pamphlets and raising the future King of France, Henri IV; her intervention in the Reformation has determined scholars' understanding of her role in helping to rewrite and reconceive her mother's work.[188] I have tried here to suggest that we find in both the composition and publication of the *Comédie*, and in the posthumous publication of *L'Heptaméron*, a more cautious and complicated form of collaborative modesty arising between mother and daughter. Marguerite and Jeanne's relationship develops from an initial set of memories reworked in the *Comédie* into a political and publishing network which persists beyond Marguerite's lifetime. Following Marguerite's death, Jeanne's role expands, as is now well known, to *L'Heptaméron* and the collaboration with Gruget, who both works to 'rem[ettre] en son vray ordre, confus au paravant en sa

[188] Freccero, 'Queer Nation', 37. See also David Bryson, *Queen Jeanne and the Promised Land: Dynasty, Homeland, Religion and Violence in Sixteenth-Century France* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Stjerna, *Women*, pp. 163-73.

premiere impression' her novellas after Pierre Boaistuau's first edition, and places Marguerite's name on the title page.[189]

This reliance on Gruget to carry out the republishing of *L'Heptaméron* exemplifies the need for women, even those of royal blood, to be helped by men for their pursuits in the sphere of print. But also, intriguingly, while it reflects a restriction on royal women's actions, it also provides the same women with agency. Through Gruget, Jeanne claims to be restoring her mother's work back to the way she would have wanted it to be. Her desire to protect Marguerite's good name as a writer and her autonomy over her text is referred to in Gruget's prefatory dedication. In his brief address, he highlights Jeanne's 'consentement', alongside that of the King, in approving of the printing of his edition since the first edition 'vous deplaisoit', he says to Jeanne.[190] Gruget suggests that it was Jeanne who commissioned the work and he praises it in her name, since 'il es sorty de [sa] maison illustre'.[191] While this assertion could be a simple means of Gruget validating his own authority as an editor, nevertheless, it officially recognizes Jeanne's intervention in her mother's literary output.[192] Gruget goes on to mimic Jeanne's own hopes for her mother's illustrious reputation. Her good name 'merite loënge […] par dessus les plus excellens dames mais aussi entre les plus doctes hommes'.[193]

This claim is highly contentious, not least because Gruget is a known Reformist editor, and as a self-affirming Protestant ruler, who had converted to Calvinism only a year

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[189] Claude Gruget, 'A Tresillustre, et tresvertueuse princesse, ma dame Jeanne, Royne de Navarre, Claude Gruget, son treshumble serviteur, desire salut & felicité', in Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptameron des Nouvelles de Tresillustre et Tresexcellente Princesse Marguerite de Valois, Royne de Navarre*, ed. by Claude Gruget (Paris: Benoist Prevost, 1560), p. ã ii. See also Febvre, *Amour sacré*, pp. 199-200; Nancy E. Virtue, 'Translation as Violation: A Reading of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoire tragiques*', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 22.3 (1998), 35-58 (pp. 36-37); Bernard Weinberg, *Critical Prefaces of the French Renaissance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1950), p. 179.
[190] Gruget, 'A Tresillustre, et tresvertueuse princesse', pp. 1-2.
[191] Ibid., p. 2.
[192] See Nicole Cazauran, 'Boaistuau et Gruget éditeurs de *L'Heptaméron*: à chacun sa part', in *L'Écrivain éditeur. 1. Du Moyen Âge à la fin du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. by François Bessire, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 2001-2002), I (2001), pp. 149-69 (p. 151).
[193] Gruget, 'A Tresillustre, et tresvertueuse princesse', p. 2.

after Gruget's edition appeared in print (1560), Jeanne also aligns her mother with her own religious inclinations.[194] During her lifetime, Marguerite's Reformed views were controversial and particularly alarmed the Sorbonne.[195] In the midst of the Wars of Religion, Jeanne was the leader of the Huguenot faction in France and engaged in religious propaganda to support the Protestant cause.[196] Within this context, the publication circumstances of *L'Heptaméron* reveal an effort on Jeanne's part to 'reinstate the integrity of her mother's text'[197] and to transform her mother's Reformed image retrospectively into a crypto-Protestant one. Jeanne's desire to protect Marguerite's good name as a writer and her autonomy over her text is referred to in Gruget's prefatory dedication. He expresses the desire to 'rendre' the work 'digne de son auteur' and to reinforce the Queen's own grandeur; she is a 'vray ornament de nostre siecle'.[198] His acknowledgement of Jeanne's approval is evidence of her intervention in fashioning her mother's retrospective identity. She restores her mother's name by attaching it to this work.

Alongside important editorial decisions, Jeanne and Gruget remove the rather scandalous novella 11 to retain Marguerite's modesty, a move that I will address in Chapter 4. As we have seen, Jeanne's key interventions into Marguerite's work may usefully (and retrospectively) be divided into three main parts: first collaborative publication of the 1559 edition of *L'Heptaméron*, second, the theme of the mother-daughter relationship in novellas 21 and 40, and third, Jeanne's marriage and its impact on the composition and performance of the *Comédie*. Taken together these amount to an involvement in collaborative modesty which strengthens Jeanne's at once historical and literary significance; no longer is she

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[194] See Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, pp. 20, 105-06, 186; Virtue, 'Translation as Violation', 35-58; Williams, 'Marguerite de Navarre', p. 93.
[195] Elizabeth C. Zegura, 'What the Monk's Habit Hides: Excavating the Silent Truths in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* 31', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 38.2 (2015), 53-92 (p. 59).
[196] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, pp. 20, 186.
[197] Ibid., p. 106.
[198] Gruget, 'A Tresillustre, et tresvertueuse princesse', p. 1.

simply a Protestant leader of the religious wars, but she is also a notable participant in facilitating her mother's literary output and reception. Gruget himself reinforces this argument by inserting Jeanne into the framework of female companionship. He dedicates the work to the 'tresillustre & tresvertueuse princesse, ma dame Jeanne, Royne de Navarre' and in his preface he connects the women together through family ties.[199] He makes it clear to his audience that Jeanne is Marguerite's daughter by referring to Marguerite as '[sa] mere' and he places *L'Heptaméron* in her name, 'puis qu'il est sorty de [sa] maison illustre.'[200] This gives Jeanne a claim to Marguerite's work; while it is her mother who composes the work, Jeanne births it in print.

Beginning the study of modesty undertaken in this thesis with Marguerite de Navarre, this chapter provides an example of how an important Renaissance woman may question the relevance and power of the ideal type of modesty in sixteenth-century French society. Using the resources of theatre, she addresses questions of the female body, desire, chastity, womanhood, and agency, to encourage her audience to think about the society in which they live. From the performance of the *Comédie* to its publication, her time at the court of Nérac offers her a localized approach to this, inspiring Marguerite to set up a framework of courtly debate and discussion. She uses modesty as a lens through which she considers different forms of womanhood which may or may not be achievable in real life. Within the realm of debate and discussion, a group of women focus their discussion on one of these potential alternative lifestyles, married chastity, which may offer women more freedom against the societal constraints of modesty.

In this tradition of discussing modesty and chastity among women, the compositional and printing history of *L'Heptaméron* and the *Comédie* reveals a real-life female partnership

[199] Ibid., p. 1.
[200] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

between Marguerite and her daughter. Jeanne's stake in the development of her mother's literary works and public reception situates her as an equally important agent in collaborative modesty as Marguerite's male peers. She facilitates the Queen's entry in print and ensures that her name lives on beyond her death. This quest for writerly immortality is present in many forms of localized and collaborative modesty in this study, especially between mothers and daughters. The question of female agency in Marguerite's work and publication history is a prominent theme in the works and lives of the next generation of *poitevines* poets, the 'Dames des Roches', whose works and collaboration will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Les Dames des Roches: The Body, Conflict, and The Salon in Late Sixteenth-Century Poitiers

Introduction

Highly admired salon hostesses and prolific writers during the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Catholic mother-daughter duo, Madeleine and Catherine, published their volumes under the joint authorial name of the 'Dames des Roches', the first sign of their collaborative modesty. The fact that the two women chose to publish their three works together as *mere et fille* did not prevent them from possessing individualized voices within this socially acceptable family unit. They also had separate surnames: Madeleine's maiden name was Neveu, and Catherine, Madeleine's only surviving child, drew her surname from her mother's first marriage: Fradonnet.[1] The 'Dames des Roches' is thus an artificially constructed enterprise, taken from the name of a property owned by Madeleine, which underlines the significance of place in their collective work.

Poitiers was a perfect location for their intellectual life, boasting a good university, royal courts and well-known families of printers.[2] The importance of learning in Poitiers was brought into the Des Roches' personal quarters through their salon in which they exchanged ideas with peers. The reception of the Dames des Roches can be divided into two specific moments: firstly, early twentieth-century scholarship emphasized *La Puce de Madame Des-Roches* (1582), a collaborative project between the Des Roches and fellow male poets who composed *blasons* based on a flea which landed on Catherine's bosom. This body of work was used to showcase male poets' talent for writing about their erotic desires

[1] Kenny, *Born to Write*, p. 114.
[2] Hilary J. Bernstein, *Between Crown and Community: Politics and Civic Culture in Sixteenth-Century Poitiers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 10.

and women's bodies.[3] More recently, scholars have emphasized the women themselves, stressing their own creative enterprise in responding to male poets' configuration of the ideal woman in their treatment of gender norms, female education and chastity.[4] My own intervention into this story is to explore the degree to which these poets were already responding to male discourses of women before *Puce*, and, by engaging with what we might usefully call their own 'subcultures' of modesty.

My argument is two-fold: firstly, Madeleine and Catherine, rather than simply reflecting sixteenth-century notions of modesty, experiment with and appropriate them in innovative ways. More specifically, they form their own, highly individualized commentaries, defined by local cultural and historical events in Poitiers. In Madeleine's odes 6 and 8 (*Œuvres*), the violent conflict of the sieges of Poitiers influences her Catholic fervour and her status as an immodest woman writer: this in turn leads her to deflect attention onto immodest Huguenots laying siege to the town. In other instances, her deflection of the charge of *impudeur* takes the form of desexualizing her own body through references to illness and old age in ode 4 and sonnet 8 (*Œuvres*). Here, location and confessional conflict are subordinate to Madeleine's attempt to distract attention away from her threatening position as an unconstrained widow.

In contrast, Catherine creates her own less negatively charged response to modesty. The influence of local salon culture encourages her to link the female body to intellectual inspiration rather than to shame in *Puce* (*Secondes Œuvres*). The *Grands Jours*, in particular, highly influence Catherine's perception of collaboration, for it is during this time that the

[3] See George E. Diller, *Les Dames des Roches: Étude sur la vie littéraire à Poitiers dans la deuxième moitié du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1936), pp. 63-74.
[4] See Anne R. Larsen, 'Legitimizing the Daughter's Writing: Catherine des Roches' Proverbial Good Wife', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21.4 (1990), 559-74; Ann R. Jones, *The Currency of Eros Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Cathy Yandell, '*Le temps retrouvé*: Exemplarity and the Temporal Body in Catherine des Roches', in *Carpe Corpus: Time and Gender in Early Modern France* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 175-211.

Puce is created, calling on male and female salon participants to write about Catherine's body. Catherine directly engages with and denounces these local discourses in her own *Puce* poem within the collaborative collection, namely those of Estienne Pasquier, Odet de Turnèbe and Claude Binet. In *L'Agnodice* (*Œuvres*), showcasing the erudition of a scholarly woman, Catherine transforms her *poitevin* salon into an idealized version of itself which grants women control over their voices and their bodies.

Of course, these comments on modesty are not without their dangers: the common associations between women writers in print and sexual deviance provoked suspicions of female promiscuity.[5] As a means of deflecting the force of suspicion the two women developed, as I show in the final section of this chapter, a new form of mother-daughter collaborative modesty which mobilizes their maternal-filial bond as a companionship that is played out in the literary sphere. As we will see in Chapter 4, the women equally benefit from the presence of male dedications, which conjure up images of virtue, modesty, and duty. But the women themselves also exhibit an important stake in collaborative modesty: Madeleine and Catherine re-enact the depictions that their male peers construct of them, firstly in their highly performative epistles, and then by way of Catherine's *Le Ravissement de Proserpine* (*Missives*), which heavily emphasizes the importance of their real-life mother-daughter bond, facilitating their place in print and giving them the agency to individually contest and reshape modesty to their own creative ends.

I.i. Modesty in the Works of the Dames des Roches

Both Madeleine and Catherine were cautious enough to give the appearance of following the strict gender restrictions of modesty as they moved into print. When Madeleine praises Catherine in her dedication *A ma Fille* (*Secondes Œuvres*), she recognizes that due to

[5] Wall, *Imprint*, p. 280.

respect, honour, and the importance of 'honnéte pudeur', Catherine cannot print her works on her own, especially as an unmarried woman.[6] Virtuous modest women also populate Catherine's texts: in *La Tragicomedie de Tobie* the protagonist, Sarra, is admired for her 'grace pudique',[7] whilst the innocent Proserpine in *Ravissement* is a 'fille pudique'.[8] While the Des Roches recognize a woman's reality in needing to remain modest, this does not prevent them from modifying the terms in which modesty is discussed.

ii. Madeleine des Roches

a. Anti-Huguenot Sentiment and Immodesty: Odes 6 and 8 (*Les Œuvres*)

Madeleine's first response to modesty manifests itself in the context of the Wars of Religion. In a world quite different from the one explored in the last chapter, the latter half of the sixteenth century, on a national and local level, saw violent religious upheaval in many French cities, including the Des Roches' home of Poitiers. Extreme violence from Catholics and Protestants is exemplified in the much contested massacre of numerous Protestants on St Bartholomew's Day in August 1572.[9] Members of society at all levels played a role in the wars: preachers at the pulpit stirred up popular emotions in the streets, encouraging crowds of civilians to take up weapons and exterminate the 'heretics';[10] military forces were called in to eliminate unrest; noble power increased, especially in the Catholic Guise family, which exploited mass violence for the benefit of its political alliances.[11] Natalie Zemon Davis's influential study on popular revolt has shown that Protestants and Catholics

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[6] Madeleine des Roches, 'A ma Fille', in Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *Les Secondes Œuvres*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), p. 87.
[7] Catherine des Roches, *La Tragicomedie de Tobie*, in Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *Les Œuvres*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1993), I. 7. 410.
[8] Catherine des Roches, 'Le Ravissement de Proserpine', in Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *Les Missives*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999), l. 189, p. 222.
[9] Amy E. Houston, *Defending the City, Defending the Faith: The Sieges of the French Civil Wars, 1552-1628* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 2010), pp. 2, 151.
[10] Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 5.
[11] Stuart Carroll, *Noble Power during the French Wars of Religion: The Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 250.

understood the stakes to be deadly serious;[12] defending what they deemed to be their true faith was a matter of 'salvation or damnation'.[13]

With the increasing use of print, writers and engravers created woodcuts, pamphlets and witness accounts as tools of propaganda. From both religious parties, France experienced the overwhelming circulation of polemical works which touched on the religious wars and contributed to public hostility.[14] Whilst Madeleine's poetry does not resemble such works in form, her references to civil war commonplaces suggest that she is inspired by the well-known discourses of political pamphlets and witness accounts. She exploits pro- and anti-Huguenot commonplaces of the time to share her own experience of religious turmoil in Poitiers. If the link between women's 'loose tongue[s]' and 'loose behaviour' made women in print the object of intense surveillance and scrutiny, Madeleine deflects readerly attention from her own immodest act of printing her works, to focus on her perception of immodest Huguenots.[15]

Her poetry refers frequently to the topography of Poitiers, and to the local sieges which took place. Early in the wars, in 1562, Catholic forces sacked Poitiers to 'liberate' it from Huguenot control.[16] This was followed by devastation during the later siege of Poitiers (1569), under Gaspard II de Coligny, renowned Huguenot leader, who fought against Catholic troops until the Catholic Guise family eventually defeated him. According to Marin Liberge's *Discours du succes des affaires passez au siege de Poictiers* (1569), around one thousand *poitevins* were injured or killed, and the strategic river Clain was completely dammed.[17] Madeleine's hatred of Huguenots was strengthened by the loss of her two

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[12] Natalie Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence', in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 152-88 (p. 156).
[13] Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 178.
[14] See Loretta L. Williamson, *Art and Propaganda During the French Wars of Religion* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illnois, 1978).
[15] Wiesner, *Women*, p. 160.
[16] Bernstein, *Crown and Community*, p. 12.
[17] Marin Liberge, *Discours du succes des affaires passez au siege de Poictiers, despuis le dix-neufiesme jour de juillet, 1569, jusques au vingtuniesme de septembre audict an* (Paris: Mont S. Hilaire, 1569), p. Bii.

properties, amounting to two thousand *livres*; her thirteen-year long legal battles reinforce the enduring influence of conflict on her family's livelihood.[18]

Madeleine is not unique in her willingness to involve herself in public religious debate. We find evidence of a handful of women taking part in physical violence, possessing firearms, and joining night raids against religious opponents.[19] Others acted as spies, political agents, carers of the wounded, and pamphlet sponsors.[20] Women writers and witnesses who narrated their experiences were in a dangerous position; they expected judgement from fellow observers. If, as has been noted, it was common for their writing to either exemplify praise or blame, we can identify both in Madeleine's poetry.[21] Her choice to take up the pen rather than the sword gave her the freedom to portray physical violence, and to explore its effects on women's bodies.

Madeleine's odes 6 and 8 are evocative in her condemnation of Huguenot violence in her local community; they make a direct connection between immodesty and Protestant shamelessness. In ode 6, which describes the impact of conflict in Poitiers, her mapping of her body onto a ruined landscape is highly localized and violent, matching the violent tone of ode 8. Madeleine begins with an interlocutor's designation of her as a fountain of youth, an assumption which clearly 'tent[e] [s]a patience'.[22] Conflict begins, then, in the realm of intimacy:

> [I]l vous semble que je [b]ois
> A la source de jouvence.[23]

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[18] Broomhall, *Women and Religion*, p. 139.
[19] Brian Sandberg, '"Generous Amazons Came to the Breach": Besieged Women, Agency and Subjectivity during the French Wars of Religion', *Gender and History*, 16.3 (2004), 654-88 (p. 675).
[20] Ibid., 658.
[21] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 173.
[22] Madeleine des Roches, 'Ode 6', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 1, p. 108.
[23] Ibid., ll. 3-4, p. 108. In the original editions and Anne Larsen's edition of ode 6, line 3 is transcribed as '[I]l vous semble que je vois' as opposed to '[I]l vous semble que je bois'. This could make sense in the context of visual imagery which runs throughout the ode. Perhaps even Madeleine depicts herself as a kind of Narcissus, looking at herself in the pool of water, as a way of narrating her own body. However, to read 'v' for a 'b' seems odd given the more common notion of drinking from the fountain of youth. For this reason I have changed 'vois' to 'bois'.

She sharply denounces this characterization of herself. At the beginning of four subsequent stanzas, she systematically runs through various contexts that exemplify the ways in which life has ridden her of youthful joys, with the repeated use of 'Quand' at the beginning of the stanzas. She alludes to dangerous animals that have tormented her, and mythological figures such as the 'cruel Roy de Cere', who was Mezentius, the Roman king.[24] He was known for his ferocity on the battlefield; Madeleine uses this reference to emphasize that endless battles have destroyed her youth. After lamenting this characterization, she shifts the atmosphere:

> Quand le tourment domestique
> Qui blesse dans la maison,
> Auroit pillé ma raison
> Comme le repos publique;
>
> Si auray-je l'ame atteinte
> D'une extreme marrisson,
> Oyant le tragique son
> D'une si juste complainte
>
> L'object triste et lamentable
> Devant noz yeux presenté
> Faict la mesme cruauté
> De noz mal-heurs pitoyable.[25]

Madeleine deflects poetic attention away from herself and onto religious conflict. Deploying the practice of pillaging ('pillé'), she suggests that the violence has had a significant impact on her mind: the frazzling of Madeleine's 'raison' implies that the horrors of violence have psychologically wounded her. The contrast enacted in the rhyming of 'domestique' and 'publique' allows her to expand her personal experience onto the public stage. Her house has become an extension of France itself, for just like the country, it has been invaded by Protestants. No longer an alarmingly youthful and independent widow, she figures herself as feeble, old, and powerless. By the same token, the defilement of France is seen through the eyes of the more locally inflected violation of Madeleine's body. Resembling a primary

[24] Ibid., l. 13, p. 108.
[25] Ibid., ll. 17-28, p. 109.

witness account, she notes that '[d]evant noz yeux', Huguenots openly '[v]iol[ent] les sainctes loix' of the Catholic faith.[26] She creates a personal collaborative Catholic community, concretized by modes of address of 'vous' and 'nous'.[27] She remains within social and religious practice whilst ironically pushing boundaries as an immodest woman voicing her zeal and personal testimony. This means that when she writes of 'noz mal-heurs', she includes her audience in her misfortune; her bodily pain is felt by fellow Catholics, especially in Poitiers.[28]

We are encouraged to revert back to the 'repos publique' that Madeleine refers to earlier on in ode 6.[29] Together, these lines further extend Madeleine's body to acquire more Catholic bodies, forming one big public body. The term 'violer' exhibits a physical force on the part of Huguenots who have attempted to impose their beliefs on Poitiers, and on France. It also alludes to sexual assault which both reinforces the sinful nature and unwanted intrusion of Huguenots. This violation extends a somatic relation between the city, its buildings, the body politic, and Madeleine's own body, gendered female. Equally, it draws on a common connection between Protestantism and promiscuity in pro-Catholic discourses. Rumours were spread about the sexual impurity of Protestants, especially of Protestant women who turned the world upside down with their impropriety.[30] In other cases, Protestant heresy was linked with adultery; Protestant husbands were lechers or cuckolds.[31] Since modesty is concerned with controlling sexual behaviour, then Madeleine's use of 'violer', in a sexual context, reiterates her link between Huguenots and immodesty. Their

[26] Ibid., ll. 26, 31, p. 109.
[27] Ibid., ll. 51, 57, pp. 110-11.
[28] Ibid., p. 109.
[29] Ibid., l. 20, p. 109.
[30] Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 31.
[31] Ibid., pp. 31, 131.

'vaine religion'[32] and sows 'la contagion'[33] as 'ce malin people de fer'[34] shamelessly terrorize people with false words and defile the Catholic nation. Ode 6 therefore underscores the significance of Protestant discourse as a source of undeniable immodesty; not simply a tale of national devastation, the poem starts and ends as a highly personalized account of Madeleine's outrage in Poitiers.

Ode 6 concludes by taking this reworking of the image of the body one step further in its direct allusion to a female body. It is potentially the strongest revelation of Protestant immodesty:

> Ravir la vierge Vestale,
> Violer son chaste vœu,
> Vomir l'impudique feu[35]

Madeleine could not be any cruder in her suggestion that Protestants have ultimately violated the purest and most religious example of a modest woman: the Virgin Mary. The violent acts of 'ravir' and 'violer' emphasize that the Virgin encompasses a range of familial violent images in religious conflict: the raping of nuns, the profanation of the female body, and the attack on France as a sacred land. The virginal body is therefore extended to the body politic and the term 'violer' is strengthened. If we align this with Madeleine's account of the body as a building in ruins, a highly charged network of buildings, bodies, the Catholic faith, and land emerges; the poem is a complex image of an all-encompassing defilement of France.

Madeleine's preoccupation with the physical implications of conflict comes to the forefront in ode 8, a celebration of the influential Guise family and men who resist Protestant attacks during the 1569 siege. In favour of the Catholic 'guerrier[s] de dieu', this ode presents a staged immediacy of events in which the description of violence inflicted on the

[32] Roches, 'Ode 6', l. 38, p. 110.
[33] Ibid., l. 39, p. 110.
[34] Ibid., l. 42, p. 110.
[35] Ibid., ll. 53-55, p. 111.

body is graphic.[36] Instead of highlighting the modest body's chastity and purity, she presents its violation in detail. Geographical specificity adds to the description of the events a clear impact on the ways in which conflict is depicted, but more importantly it shapes how the body – the poet's own body – is presented. Death is a prominent theme in these instances, with frequent references made to bodies and bones lying in the flooded areas of Poitiers, including that of the great 'Catholic warrior' Antoine de Saint-Jean, '[t]ombé sur la rive du fleuve' in ode 8.[37] Constant references to landscape, to ruined fortified walls, and to the 'petit Clain' river, filled with dead bodies across a number of her poems, mark Madeleine's discussion of the siege.[38] In ode 8 she expands both on her depiction of local surroundings, and on her own connection to the landscape. Lending her voice to Themis, goddess of Justice, the poet calls on her home city to listen with care:

> Tirant sa formidable voix:
> Poëtiers, dit-elle, à ceste fois
> Escoute les vers que je chante.
>
> Or' que Typhon faict denicher
> De ce miserable rocher
> Ces monstres vivans de rapine[.][39]

Here 'rocher' is a *jeu de mots*, based on Madeleine's surname; such witty playfulness with anagrams and puns are regularly employed by Madeleine and Catherine, and their fellow male salon-goers, to draw attention to a deep connection between the women and their local surroundings, and, more specifically, the people who have inspired them.[40] In this case a 'miserable rocher' allows Madeleine to entrench herself into the history and heritage of

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[36] Stuart Carroll, 'The Rights of Violence', in *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 127-63 (p. 136).
[37] Madeleine des Roches, 'Ode 8', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 51, p. 114.
[38] Ibid., l. 80, p. 117.
[39] Ibid., ll. 13-15, p. 114.
[40] See Tarte, *Writing Places*, pp. 61, 104-05, 115-16.

Poitiers, simultaneously avowing and disavowing a personal desire. She reflects what Tom Conley has described as 'cartographic subjectivity'.[41]

In early modern cartographical writing, Conley finds a specific relationship created between the self and national space in which there is a desire to 'locate and implant oneself in a named space, a drive to imagine connections between the "I", the locale of its utterance, and the origins of its birth[.]'[42] While Conley's theory is very useful in understanding the self as mapped onto a landscape, he looks at the cartographic writer primarily as masculine. Madeleine, as a woman writer, opens up this male tradition with her emphasis on the *poitevin* landscape and unearths a set of moves by a woman who maps her own female body onto land. This personalized engagement is a way to express her selfhood and to create a number of affective moments which strengthen her justification to voice her experience, whilst also mitigating the impact of her outspokenness in a public arena. She plays on a commonplace already set up by men who relate her name to Poitiers as a site of male conquest.[43] Her 'rocher' becomes a hidden and immodest demonstration of her importance in Poitiers, behind both the classical goddess, and a veil of topographical description. In ode 8 the act of unearthing monsters behind a 'rocher' unveils Madeleine's own efforts in her poetry to condemn and humanize dehumanize her fellow Protestants: they are unnatural, cruel, and above all immodest.

As Zemon Davis affirms, brutality was prominent in the wars of sixteenth-century France. In her analysis of cultural practices, she notes that Catholic parties developed methods of purification, often burning or drowning bodies as a ritual of religious cleansing.[44] Protestants, on the other hand, most often defiled religious objects in iconoclastic

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[41] Tom Conley, *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 303.
[42] Ibid., p. 303.
[43] Ibid., pp. 62, 74-75.
[44] Davis, 'Rites', p. 179.

rampages.[45] This is noted in ode 8 by the destruction of the city walls, 'presque ruinez'.[46] As the famous engravings of Protestants Jean Perrissin and Jacques Tortorel make clear, images of naked bodies, including women baring their breasts, and destroyed land, became an integral part of the print wars. We find this in their engraving of conflict in Tours (July 1562) in *Les Quarante Tableaux*, printed in Geneva (1570), in which naked people are spread across the landscape, bloody and exposed, some drowning, others whose naked flesh have been eaten by birds of prey or pulled out by rival soldiers. The brutality depicted in this engraving suggests that religious violence opened up a loophole in the laws governing the common representation of the body; physical brutality could be depicted explicitly as a sanctioned propaganda tool.



Figure 2. Jean Perrissin and Jacques Tortorel, 'Le massacre fait a Tours par la populace au mois de Juillet. 1562.', in *Premier volume, contenant quarante tableaux ou Histoire diuerses qui sont memorables touchant les guerres, massacres, and troubles aduenus en France en ces dernieres annees* (Geneva: J de Laon, 1570), p. 26.

[45] Ibid., p. 182.
[46] Roches, 'Ode 8', l. 68, p. 118.

Thus Madeleine, as an outspoken woman, does not stand out in her immodest comments on the body. If we read her ode alongside the engraving of Tours, we find very striking similarities between these visual and poetic depictions of conflict, which verge on the pornographic. The composers highlight the same level of violence: dead bodies are scattered across open land, enemy attackers violate naked women, and military men swarm the area to fight against others. Evidently the landscapes are not quite the same. However, compared with Perrissin's and Tortorel's engraving of the siege of Poitiers, there is a striking resemblance of local topography with Madeleine's ode. Perrissin and Tortorel capture the hilly landscape alongside the marshy areas closer to the river Clain. The soldiers battling proudly with arms and flags reflect ode 8's patriotic dedication to Catholic fighters, and the ruined walls are depicted in various places, which Madeleine highlights in her work. As we see with François Nautré's later artistic depiction of the siege of Poitiers Madeleine describes some of the key characteristics of her local surroundings.



Figure 3. Jean Perrissin and Jacques Tortorel, 'Poityers assiegé par M. les Princes le 24. De Juilet & tout Aoust jusques au 7. de Septembre 1569', in *Premier volume, contenant quarante tableaux ou Histoire diuerses qui sont memorables touchant les guerres, massacres, and troubles aduenus en France en ces dernieres annees* (Geneva: J de Laon, 1570), p. 64.



Figure 4. François Nautré, *The Siege of Poitiers by the Admiral Coligny*, 1619, oil on canvas, 194 x 365 cm, Musée Sainte-Croix, Poitiers.

The *Quarante Tableaux* and her personal account form part of a huge body of works which repeat and reuse similar commonplaces. Jean de Léry's *L'Histoire mémorable du siège et de la famine de Sancerre* (1573) champions the Protestant side during the siege of Sancerre and recounts the horrific violence imposed on them:

> Or la pluspart des pionniers estoyent morts, et avoyent esté tuez devant la ville, et […] ceux qui restoyent mouroyent de faim, ne buvoyent que de l'eau, et estoyent presque tous malades des grandes froidures[.][47]

Many of the violent acts that Léry describes are portrayed visually in the *Quarante Tableaux.* The striking resemblances of violence in Madeleine's odes and other works raise the question of whether she deliberately engages with contemporary visual intertexts and discourses. There is no scholarship that recognizes these texts and images in her private library and correspondence. However, it seems highly probable that Madeleine has in mind these already-existing discourses and images which are pro-Protestant in tone. She is,

[47] Jean de Léry, *L'Histoire mémorable du siège et de la famine de Sancerre*, ed. by Géralde Nakam (Geneva: Slatkine, 2000), p. 269.

however, an unusual voice in that she directly reworks Protestant images, reverses expectations, and undermines Protestant propaganda for herself and for the *poitevine* cause.

Ode 8 also reveals, albeit behind a veil of modesty, Madeleine's more ambitious aims of writing and seizing a public voice. The figure of Themis, associated with the victory of the Guise family, mimics Madeleine's own outspokenness in calling on the people of Poitiers to hear 'les vers [qu'elle] chante'.[48] In this way Madeleine plays a part in the creation and recording of history, and signals the importance of a woman's first-person testimony, as can also be seen in ode 6 with her own voice: 'je plains en triste voix'.[49] By virtue of this act, she risks becoming cast as an immodest woman, though her personal and emotive expression of Catholic zeal dilutes this threat. Ode 8 also marshals 'deux Vierges Roines'[50] to the cause, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Joan of Arc, two well-known figures connected to Poitiers's history: Eleanor was once the countess de Poitou and Joan endured an interrogation in Poitiers to assure her criticizers of the legitimacy of her vocation.[51] These women play a significant role in adding to Madeleine's legitimacy as a public woman. As patroness and Queen consort of France and England, Eleanor exercised great political and economic power during the Middle Ages. This dual ability to be a woman and an admired public figure is Madeleine's demonstration that women can acquire an important public standing without jeopardizing their status; her particular influence in the arts equally shows that women too can participate in literary production. In the case of Joan of Arc, she is firstly a virgin martyr; she reflects an inner strength and desire to resist male authorities who restricted her.[52] Her time in Poitiers in which notable men in society subjected her to ruthless religious examinations underlines Madeleine's own plight to escape public wrath regarding

[48] Roches, 'Ode 8', l. 12, p. 114.
[49] Roches, 'Ode 6', l. 58, p. 111.
[50] Roches, 'Ode 8', l. 75, p. 118.
[51] See Footnote 106 in Ibid., p. 118.
[52] Maud B. McIrney, *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 204.

her entry into public life. Joan's subsequent success in convincing such men to give her a public platform is also a testament to Madeleine's determination to do the same in her contemporary times.

Beyond this, Joan acts as a fellow woman caught up in a besieged part of France and, like Madeleine, she contributes to the creation and memory of a history of conflict and violence. Most importantly, in the history of Joan's perception, there is a strong impression of her chastity as a defining characteristic. Though she is by no means a wholly admired figure during and previous to Madeleine's time of writing, her virginity is for the most part undisputed.[53] We find a number of medieval and early modern authors, including Christine de Pizan, Giovanni Boccaccio, and François Béroalde de Verville, who replace Joan's name for 'la Pucelle' or 'Puella'.[54] Her story sheds light on the ability for a woman to simultaneously become a public *guerrière de Dieu* and to retain her chastity. Like Joan, Madeleine is both a public actor and a chaste woman.

These important female figures are grouped as a community of strong women who participate in war and the creation of history. They strengthen Madeleine's poetic voice and therefore give her the means to 'upset traditional distinctions' between men and women.[55] She becomes an early advocate of the nascent tradition of the *femme forte*, proclaimed by Ian Maclean to have originated in seventeenth-century feminist literature.[56] The illustrious *femme forte*, he argues, primarily created by masculine writers to highlight the glory of

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[53] Craig Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 48.
[54] Jean Maurice, 'La naissance d'une légende: "la présence sensible" de la Pucelle dans le *Ditié* de Jeanne d'Arc de Christine de Pizan', in *Images de Jeanne d'Arc: Actes du Colloque de Rouen, 25,26,27 mai 1999* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), pp. 79-88 (pp. 83, 85). See also Jean-Claud Arnould, 'La crise du mythe johannique entre 1570 et 1580', in *Images de Jeanne d'Arc*, pp. 143-51 (p. 143); Frank Greiner, 'La Pucelle d'Orléans de Béroalde de Verville et l'idéal de la femme forte', in *Images de Jeanne d'Arc*, pp. 133-43 (p. 133); Michèle Guéret-Laferté, 'L'influence du courant humaniste sur l'image de Jeanne d'Arc', in *Images de Jeanne d'Arc*, pp. 99-108 (pp. 107).
[55] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 177.
[56] Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French literature 1610-1652*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 64.

women, demonstrated a certain *merveille* in her exceptionality.[57] Nuancing Maclean's study, we might argue that Madeleine's work shows how this *femme forte* may be located earlier, and constructed by a woman herself, emerging from the sixteenth-century religious wars. She aligns herself with various *femmes fortes* as a way to think about herself.[58]

Odes 6 and 8, taken together, demonstrate the sheer devastation of various bodies: buildings, violated women, and the body politic of France, and therefore offers a new way of thinking about contamination and the body. Through her own immodest means, she incorporates local topography into the narrative which demonstrates her personal investment and connection with her ruined city. She communicates to her audience that she has been mentally and physically wounded by the trauma of violence, whilst also emphasizing the exemplarity of fighting, writing women who came before her. Her stake in the emotional and financial consequences of the *poitevins* sieges inspires her response to modesty and justifies her entry into print.

b. Illness and Aging: Ode 4 and Sonnet 8 (*Les Œuvres*)

A second and striking creative response to modesty is a commentary of Madeleine's own ageing body, which she depicts in graphic ways. She was plagued with bad health, further intensified by old age and the stresses of a thirteen-year lawsuit over her damaged properties, due to local religious turmoil.[59] Old age and illness are themes that run throughout all of the works of both Madeleine and Catherine*,* most notably, Madeleine's ode 4 and sonnet 8 (*Œuvres*), which give her a platform to respond personally to her ill health. Behind her literary responses to her physical state lies a personalized account of her dealings with widowhood in which she tries to excuse her position as an independent and potentially

[57] Ibid., pp. 79, 119.
[58] As we shall see, it is a strategy which Coignard also employs in her narrative of Judith from the Bible.
[59] Broomhall, *Women and Religion*, p. 139.

immodest woman in print. Local turbulence contributes to the image that Madeleine depicts of herself as a feeble widow in her take on modesty. Alongside the themes of old age and illness in ode 4 and sonnet 8, she presents a different perception of her body, stripped of modesty's connotations of sexuality and shame.

In ode 4, Madeleine plays on the relationship between her body and her soul and focuses on their contamination due to illness. She discusses her body, especially, not for its erotic charge; instead she chooses to highlight the stark brutality of the pain that she experiences. This feeble voice does not match up to the bold woman who reproaches her Protestant peers in Poitiers. In comparison with the themes of contagion in her odes on religious conflict, she firstly evokes the image of a sorcerer who has filled her languishing body with poison. Her suffering is not self-inflicted, but rather unfairly imposed on her by a 'sorcier rempli d'envie'.[60] As a result, she laments the pain that she suffers, often in a violent way. Here the body and soul are immediately separated: 'Que l'ame aux sens asservie'.[61] This pain can only be relieved once she experiences death. Naming the Hydra, the many-headed Greek mythological creature which had long served as an emblem of sedition, she evokes the hammering of her own head and the shooting pains which attack her mind, as well as her body:

> Je voy tousjours l'Hydre preste
> A me marteler la teste
> Par contraire mouvement:
> Car quand l'un guerir s'appreste,
> L'autre prend accroisement.[62]

She anticipates the adverse pains that she experiences and focuses on her never-ending 'tristesse profonde' in this to and fro between the body and soul; when one seems to cure itself, the other then grows in pain.[63] This reference to Hydra is also representative of the

[60] Madeleine des Roches, 'Ode 4', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 1, p. 101.
[61] Ibid., l. 4, p. 101.
[62] Ibid., ll. 11-15, p. 102.
[63] Ibid., l. 9, p. 102.

pain that has been inflicted on Madeleine due to ongoing conflict in Poitiers. In fact, this monster becomes a commonplace for poets during the Wars of Religion; Ronsard, for instance, employs the monster in his violent poetry as a means of expressing the growing surge of Protestant support that must be destroyed. He introduces the Hydra to show that just when Catholic forces think that the Protestant rebellion has been crushed, another faction grows in a different part of France.[64] Madeleine perhaps similarly connects religious conflict to her own experience of illness, pointing to the devastating effects of Protestant violence on her body and soul.

As she notes beforehand, the poison in her body makes her soul a slave to her senses; it '[b]rusle comme le tison'.[65] The simile, in which she compares her soul to an ember, suggests that whatever flame there may be, it is soon to burn out like her own life. This 'feu' imagery also appears in sonnet 8 in which Madeleine affirms, 'le feu de mon esprit perd sa douce lumiere'.[66] This element of fire and burning is of course a prominent commonplace in sixteenth-century writing, which often is used in the context of desire. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 1, the *Comédie* makes this connection in the dialogue of an anonymous wife who pines for the lost love of her husband, who has left her for another: 'Je brûle et ards, je me morfonds, je sue'.[67] We find another overlap between the two works: in Madeleine's sonnet 8, she expresses her inability to sleep properly at night: 'La perte du repos me faict plus de tourment'.[68] This mirrors the second married woman who laments her own lack of sleep: 'Toute la nuit sans dormir'.[69] When we compare the two works, we might be inclined to perceive Madeleine's restlessness as a demonstration of lovesickness or eroticism.

[64] See Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 99-110.
[65] Roches, 'Ode 4', l. 5, p. 101.
[66] Madeleine des Roches, 'VIII', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 12, p. 128.
[67] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 258.
[68] Roches, 'VIII', l. 7, 128.
[69] Navarre, *Comédie*, I. 4. 254.

Additionally, like a blason, her poem focuses on specific body parts. In the *blason* genre, when a poet dissects the female body, he usually focuses on the breast, beautiful eyes, or hair. Yet here in sonnet 8 and in her ode 4, Madeleine substitutes common associations of fire and restlessness for a more morbid expression of impending death and decay. She plays with sexually arousing discourses, normally associated with a beautiful, youthful beloved, and undermines them by showing that time has taken away her beauty and desire. In ode 4, she chooses to focus on more obscure or at least unexpected parts of the body. She mentions a coldness '[p]ar le millieu de [s]es os'[70] and her eyelid: 'Que ma paupiere fut close'.[71] The eyelid, close to the poetically inspired eye, but not identical to it, gives Madeleine the authority to steer her audience toward sexual connotations, only to disappoint them.

This idea is taken further when she describes particular pains associated with specific areas of the body and the soul. The revelation of the body risked inciting shame or embarrassment; yet Madeleine's discourse succeeds in its ability to deflect such criticism.[72] Madeleine laments the 'douleur trop pressante' on her bones in ode 4, depriving her of food and sleep.[73] In describing her whole body as 'sec, froid, et debile', she encourages her audience to picture a corpse slowly rotting away.[74] Likewise, her soul is 'lent, mort et labile'.[75] Madeleine states that both suffer so much that '[elle] ne di[t]', as if her words will never be able to truly capture the intensity of pain.[76] This descent will not end until she reaches a 'sommeil perpetuel': death.[77]

There is a hidden, medically inflected authority here; Madeleine diagnoses herself to show that her body and her soul in themselves are neither strong nor healthy. The particular

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[70] Roches, 'Ode 4', l. 23, p. 102.
[71] Ibid., l. 29, p. 103.
[72] Lianne McTavish, *Childbirth and the Display of Authority in Early Modern France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 68.
[73] Roches, 'Ode 4', l. 24, p. 102.
[74] Ibid., l. 17, p. 102.
[75] Ibid., l. 16, p. 102.
[76] Ibid., l. 18, p. 102.
[77] Ibid., l. 30, p. 103.

slowness of her moves and thoughts alludes to Time's scorn. This self-fashioning becomes positively intriguing when we consider Madeleine's status as a widow. To be a widow was to be a potential danger in society: a woman with a high degree of social, economic and sexual freedom.[78] As her poetry makes plain, Madeleine was in charge of her own money and she managed her own properties. Without a husband, she raised concerns of sexual autonomy. Yet, here we have a Madeleine who is neither liberated nor a merry widow stereotype. If, in ode 6, she declares that she is no longer a fountain of youth, what she offers here is a visual demonstration of this fact. She proclaims herself in this poem to be a non-threatening, unattractive suitor for the marriage economy, hence deflecting from the reality of her independent life. She exploits the weapons of modesty, even as she immodestly, and powerfully, talks about her lack of power and her refusal to complain about her pain. For instance, in sonnet 8, a sympathetic appeal is intensified by the hyperbole of '[c]ent et cent mille fois que je ne fay de plainte.'[79] She ironically implies that she does not complain about her constant torment, though in revealing her pain she does so. By contending that she silently accepts her suffering, she resembles a martyr.

Writing about her experience of illness has given her some solace. As we see in a number of her works, knowledge and reason are instrumental to Madeleine's own identity. As Kathleen Llewellyn suggests, Madeleine's references to her poetry and the inspiration that writing offers her 'make clear that she considers herself to be first and foremost a writer'.[80] This importance given to her own mind is further shown when she confesses that she prefers 'escrire que filer'.[81] She is too weak to complete even the womanly task of spinning, and though writing does not allow her to step outside her boundaries as an

[78] Wiesner, *Women*, p. 74; Kathleen M. Llewellyn, *The Widow in Early Modern French Literature* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Washington University, 2000), p. 1.
[79] Roches, 'VIII', l. 8, p. 128.
[80] Llewellyn, *The Widow*, p. 292.
[81] Roches, 'VIII', l. 14, p. 128.

impudique woman, it nonetheless relieves her weak health; it is a natural remedy. By virtue, then, it is acceptable to write. Through this concept of writerly healing she questions those who connect women's writing to promiscuity: women's writing should not be a shameful, immodest, task but rather one to encourage, especially if, in Madeleine's words, it leads to virtue and good health.

In ode 4 this idea of the healing virtue of writing becomes more complicated when Madeleine grows closer to God. To do this she transforms her body into something different from, but analogous to a house: formerly grounded on land, her body extends out the river when she metaphorically transforms into a vessel. Like a ship in a storm she risks shipwreck:

> Ma nef en ce dur orage
> Perd le voile et le cordage
> Dedans ce fleuve inconnu:
> He Dieu! je fay le naufrage
> Quand le serain est venu.[82]

It is a figurative excusal of Madeleine's widowhood; she notes that while others may view her to be free, the chains of illness and old age restrict her from seeing clearly. Using the extended metaphor of a vessel, she reveals her anxiety at the thought of the unknown, presumably after death. As Anne Larsen notes, this image is an original adaptation of a Petrarchan motif which celebrates a *nef amoureuse*. In Francesco Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (1330-74), in sonnet 189, he states, 'Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio',[83] and again in his sonnet 80, he talks of himself navigating life on a 'picciol legno'.[84] Petrarch uses the image of a vessel to relate to his silent female beloved, Laura. In contrast, Madeleine's only relationship is with God; she reverses the amorous love metaphor for a religious one: her writerly body becomes a treasured symbol of piety. This is confirmed in ode 4 as the distressing tone of her illness takes a sudden turn right at the end. On her way down an

[82] Roches, 'Ode 4', ll. 31-35, p. 103.
[83] Francesco Petrarca, 'CLXXXIX', in *Canzionere*, ed. by Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi (Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 2006), l. 1, p. 202.
[84] Francesco Petrarca, 'LXXX', in *Canzionere*, l. 3, p. 125.

unfamiliar river, which represents both the path from life to death and the unexpected state of her body and her soul, God appears. 'Quand le serain est venu', the light rainfall cools her dry body and burning soul.[85] She looks to religion for salvation, and she recovers her previously lost hope through her faith which leads her to discuss the future: initially fearing death, now she feels that she will be 'saine et entiere'[86] once again when form and matter, by their alteration, will lead 'la terre heritiere' to '[une] autre generation'.[87] Here, the separation of the body and the soul, as we have seen throughout the poem, is reversed as they are now strangely combined upon her death. More intriguingly, from this, a new generation emerges in the future. This generation reinforces the importance of writing to which Madeleine already alludes; 'la terre heritiere' symbolizes her local Poitiers, and/or even the ground of writing. The reference to another generation emblematizes the legacy of her writing, which not only captures and consoles her pain, but also leaves room for her Catherine to play an important role in her legacy. For, as we shall see, her daughter carries on the literary family line as Madeleine's bookish child. Reinforcing the theme of martyrdom in sonnet 8, ode 4 demonstrates that when healed, Madeleine's body and soul will therefore be free of contamination and raised to a higher, more honourable place. This honour does not stem from shame or embarrassment, which *pudeur* encourages; instead it originates in a personal, feminine and spiritual connection with God. The future rejuvenation of Madeleine's body is a symbol of 'heavenly salvation' in which Madeleine's body is healed and elevated by a celestial desire to leave earth and for a divine spirit.[88] Madeleine can therefore form an 'individual and intimate relationship with God' to combat the grief that she feels in her current state, leaving behind her poetry and poetically gifted daughter

[85] Roches, 'Ode 4', l. 35, p. 103.
[86] Ibid., l. 36, p. 103.
[87] Ibid., ll. 39-40, p. 103.
[88] Llewellyn, *The Widow*, p. 286.

on earth.[89] Suffering is therefore replaced with piety; Madeleine's body should be praised for its future wholeness in the eyes of God.

Location influences Madeleine's depiction of her own aging body. This is more specifically related to the horrors of the French religious wars and the legal difficulties over her damaged properties. The specific placing of ode 4 and sonnet 8 in the *Œuvres*, placed between other poems which detail Madeleine's battle with the courts, suggests that together all of these poems form part of a collection dedicated to this struggle. In sonnet 4 of her *Œuvres*, for instance, the metaphor of a ship, mimics that of ode 4. Here, Madeleine compares her legal trial to being in an ocean, likening the judge to an anchor and to a map to guide her through the water: 'Juge […] [q]ui aux mers de proces estes l'encre et la carte'.[90] She begs the judge to end this distressing voyage, and without anyone there to help her, her path on the rough waters is uncertain. If we revert back to ode 4, then, we see the poem in a new light. The metaphor of a ship in a storm is an implicit call to her legal woes. God, as the ultimate judge, forms part of an ideal for Madeleine who may seek justice. Thus, in sonnet 8, Madeleine's use of the term 'complainte' is not merely a generic marker, or even just a hidden reference to her ill health, but also a reference to her legal woes.[91] As we have identified in other moments of her poems, the commentary on such events adds to her mission to appear helpless.

Madeleine's localized treatment of modesty is evidently a sophisticated one. In the religious conflict of Poitiers she offers new ways of thinking about contamination and the body in religious terms. If any connotations of immodesty are retained in odes 6 and 8 they are used as weapons against Huguenots, and the poems concerning her own ageing and ill body further question the ideal type of modesty. What truly defines her response to this ideal

[89] Ibid., p. 327.
[90] Madeleine des Roches, 'IV', in Roches et al., *Œuvres,* ll. 1, 3, p. 176.
[91] Roches, 'VIII', l. 1, p. 128.

type is her need to protect her widowhood and her entry into print. In both the odes and sonnets, she wholeheartedly contests sixteenth-century understandings of the female body, renegotiates the terms of her own immodesty, and so prepares 'la terre heritiere /D'autre generation'.[92]

iii. Catherine des Roches

As a learned woman who was fortunate to receive a humanist education, Catherine was aware of the general suspicion towards female education in the early modern period.[93] Learned women were 'disturbing to the Renaissance mind' for they transgressed the boundaries of their gender.[94] In response to this, Catherine works against negativity and suspicion in order to forge an honourable connection between the female body and knowledge. In *Puce* and *L'Agnodice*, she defines, like her mother, her responses to modesty through her experiences of local events in Poitiers, namely by means of replicating her and her mother's salon to challenge common discourses about the female body. In a space of discussion, she highlights the benefits of being a learned woman and the fact that modesty is a social construct which limits a woman's agency. She reclaims and liberates the female body for women in her poetry and reimagines it in a way to suit her own interests.

a. Reclaiming the Female Body: *La Puce* (*Les Secondes Œuvres*)

An example of Catherine's shrewd contestation of modesty is present in *Puce*. *Puce* forms part of a bigger collaborative project between Catherine, her mother, and male poets, especially Pasquier, who attended the Des Roches' salon. Catherine benefitted from mutual learning and as her *Puce* demonstrates, drawing on discourses in circulation in this space,

[92] Roches, 'Ode 4', ll. 39-40, p. 103.
[93] Noreña, *Vives*, p. 194.
[94] Holt N. Parker, 'The Magnificence of Learned Women', *Viator*, 28.2 (2007), 265-89 (p. 265).

she sets up her own space, in which she invites further discussion on modesty and the topic of *her* female body.

Catherine was not just influenced by her local salon surroundings, but also by a particular historical moment in Poitiers: the *Grands Jours* of 1579.[95] Pasquier's discovery of a flea landing on Catherine's bosom during the local assizes of Poitiers sparked a period of prolific *blason* writing with dedications written in several languages about Catherine's body by avid attendees of the Des Roches' salon, including Catherine's herself. In Katy Emck's words, this 'multi-authored collection' conjures up a highly charged erotic energy.[96] Catherine's (im)modest exploration of a flea landing on her bosom serves as a knowing counterpoint to the often violent male tradition of the *blason*. Cathy Yandell's pioneering comparison and contrast of Catherine's and Pasquier's versions contest previous scholars who often refer to her 'circumstantial collaboration' in the works.[97] Alongside Yandell, I argue that these same male poets inspire Catherine to challenge their assumptions. We find striking similarities between her *Puce* and other poems which all touch on the same incident; Pasquier, Turnèbe and Binet treat Catherine's body as an erotic site of male desire. In Catherine's own *Puce*, she uses her body as a weapon and defines her own response to modesty. Opening her tale with the story of the flea, she draws attention to her body as a site of knowledge and chastity. It is a bold display of female empowerment which allows her to mobilize her body for her own interests.

Catherine's poem is staged as a dialogue between her voice and the contemporary discourses of the male poets of her *poitevin* salon. Inspired by the *blason* tradition, the male poets dissect the physical attributes of her body, constructing their version of the *puce* story

[95] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 26.
[96] Emck, *'A Wanton Woman'*, p. 13.
[97] Cathy Yandell, 'Of Lice and Women: Rhetoric and Gender in *La Puce de Madame des Roches*', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 20.1 (1990), 123-35 (p. 123).

using a mixture of praise, *jeu de mots* and eroticism.[98] These poems depict Catherine as a silent, female object of inspiration for male poets. In the eyes of modesty, she is theoretically unable to explicitly match erotic references. But in her *Puce*, she confronts precisely these contemporary perceptions of modesty; she engages in a deliberate play between the lines of sensuality and chastity, finding her own voice within these conflicting discourses.

Starting with Pasquier, we identify a constant symmetry emerging between Catherine's erotic discourse and his own:

> Puce qui te viens percher
> Dessus cette tendre chair,
> Au milieu des deux mammelles
> De la plus belle des belles[99]

Pasquier transforms Catherine's body into a symbol of male desire. He is a voyeur who lives vicariously through the flea's actions. This is seen later on when Pasquier's conditional tense demonstrates what he would do to Catherine if he was his rival: 'Je succerois ta poitrine'.[100] His use of verbs such as 'picque[r]', 'mor[dre]' and '[s']enyvr[er]' add to a drunken state that the flea and poet are in, completing the most intimate and perhaps even violent of actions by piercing into Catherine's breast.[101] Venturing to different parts of her body, the flea moves from the breast to the armpits as the male poet simply watches with envy: 'O que je porte d'envie'.[102] Like Pasquier, Turnèbe marvels at the flea's fortunate position, staging a tour of the female body, starting with Catherine's breasts ('entre ses mamelles'), and moving to her hair, eyes and cheek.[103] He asks the flea questions about its exploration, revealing his own wish to complete the same tour.

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[98] Emck, *'A Wanton Woman'*, p. 13.
[99] Estienne Pasquier, '*La Puce* de E. Pasquier', in *La Puce de Madame Desroches* (Paris: Damasse Jouaust, 1868), ll. 1-4, p. 14.
[100] Ibid., l. 100, p. 18.
[101] Ibid., ll. 5-7, p. 14.
[102] Ibid., ll. 11, p. 14.
[103] Odet de Turnèbe, '*La Puce* d'Odet de Tournebus', in *La Puce*, l. 66, p. 65.

In the opening lines of Catherine's poem, she explores female empowerment through the enticement of eroticism. Addressing a flea that seeks refuge in her bosom, she urges:

> Succotez le sang incarnat
> Qui colore un sein delicat,
> Vous pourrait-on dire friande
> Pour desirer telle viande?[104]

Her allusion to sensuality places her firmly within the discourses of modesty and immodesty, subtly pushing against both terms. It is a way for her to invite her male poets to invest in her work; she uses the term 'friande' which aligns the female flea with a male lover, fond of his beloved's breast. Here Catherine explicitly suggests that her flesh is akin to food. We note a rich semantic field of food imagery throughout the poem with references to 'friandise', 'repas', 'aliment' and '[n]ourriture'.[105] Between 'friande' and 'viande', her breast provides everything for the flea's nourishment: sweet and savoury tastes excite the senses. The image of the flea sucking the blood from Catherine's breast is rich in sexual appeal. *Puce* mirrors the salon as a site of debate and discussion with male peers; like the many *blason* writers in their dissection of the female body, she transforms her body into a medium of voyeurism. She allows herself to be the beloved, like Petrarch's Laura, admired not only by the male gaze but also by the poetic male mouth.[106] However, as we shall see below, she breaks with this tradition, allowing the beloved herself to speak.

As male *blason* poets commonly use similes which compare a woman's hair with golden wires and skin with ivory or alabaster, and eyes, often with stars, Catherine mimics this imagery of bodily exploration.[107] In referring to her hair she also tells the flea (whom

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[104] Catherine des Roches, 'La Puce', in Roches et al., *Secondes Œuvres*, ll. 3-6, p. 335.
[105] Ibid., ll. 8, 14, 19, 20, pp. 336-37.
[106] Janet L. Smarr, 'Substituting for Laura: Objects of Desire for Renaissance Women Poets', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 38.1 (2001), 1-30 (p. 1).
[107] Ann R. Jones, 'Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence', *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), 135-53 (p. 147).

she addresses with a respectful 'vous'), 'vous cachez aux cheveux longz'.[108] This matches Turnèbe's poem in which he delights in the flea's ability to hang in her hair:

> As tu bien esté si osée
> De te pendre à ses beaux cheveux[?][109]

In other places Catherine observes that the flea hides '[a]ux replys de l'acoutrement', denoting a space of intimacy with the woman's clothes, again mimicking Turnèbe's image of entanglement.[110]

This calls to mind Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry in post-colonial writing. Bhabha's explanation of Indian writers imitating white novelistic modes unveils a hidden authority, in appearing to repeat a discourse that is 'almost the same, but not quite'.[111] Such imitation produces a continual slippage, excess or difference in its ambivalence, reflecting a 'complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power' and therefore becomes a tool that subtly undermines the colonizer's oppression. Patriarchal oppression is Catherine's colonizer.[112] Modesty limits her ability to discuss the female body in the same way that male poets do. Yet, she defies such double standards by placing her poem in between poems which call on the same tone of eroticism. Pasquier's poetic version of the flea, for instance, opens with *his* witnessing of the flea's exploration of the young woman's sensual body with great envy.[113] Catherine's *Puce* mimics Pasquier's poetic discourse, but like a camouflage, it disguises its ability to 'destroy narcissistic authority' in the male *blason* tradition.[114] By mirroring male poets' discourses,

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[108] Roches, 'Puce', l. 31, p. 336.
[109] de Turnèbe, 'La Puce', ll. 73-74, p. 65.
[110] Roches, 'Puce', l. 52, p. 337.
[111] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 121-31 (p. 122).
[112] Ibid., p. 122.
[113] Yandell, 'Of Lice', 126.
[114] Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry', p. 129.

Catherine subtly and immodestly experiments with sexual desire behind the veil of modesty itself.

In other parts of the *Puce* collection, location is an important factor; Catherine's body is often presented as an extension of Poitiers, whose breasts represent its mountainous regions.[115] In other places, poets even mimic Madeleine's extension of the female body, comparing Catherine to a besieged city as a 'rocher', 'roche' or 'rochette'. This occurs in Binet's sonnet which suggests that her body and the city of Poitiers may both be invaded.[116] In contrast, Catherine makes her body impossible to pin down. Against the backdrop of male erotic discourses, she 'sets up a screen on which the erotic figuration of the expected female presence is projected, while, behind it, the body escapes in flight'.[117] She is no longer an admired object of idolatry but rather a powerful agent who employs a strategy of self-glorification. Her response to modesty here is experimental, and one which is shaped by her frustrations with the misogynist undertones of the male-dominated collaborative salon within which *Puce* originates.

As if to underline this capacity for productive mimicry, Catherine re-imagines the status and intentions of the flea and subsequently transforms her own body into a refuge. The rupture of 'Vraiment, nenny' after the initial six lines of the poem allows her to bluntly dismiss her body as a food for sensual thought.[118] This matters, because as a childless unmarried woman in society, in theory, at least, she is free to do, speak, and act as she pleases. She might seem to be in a rather threatening position in the face of suspicious and would-be seductive men. So, in *Puce*, she figures herself as an honorary mother to the flea which is described with youthful vigour, demonstrating a 'vive, gaye, promte, et agile'

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[115] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 69.
[116] Ibid., pp. 73-74.
[117] Tilde Sankovitch, 'The Body and Its Figures: Textual Strategies in the Writings of the Dames Des Roches', in *Women Writers in Pre-Revolutionary France: Strategies of Emancipation*, ed. by Colette H. Winn and Donna Kuizenga (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 57-68 (p. 59).
[118] Roches, 'Puce', l. 7, p. 335.

character.[119] Readers realize that this flea is not a screen for male desire like other counterparts in the game. This female flea is, furthermore, to be lauded, not for her ability to hide in the depths of Catherine's breast but for her innocence: 'Vostre blessure n'est cruelle'.[120] By changing the nature of her flea, not as a figment of the male gaze but as an innocent female who seeks shelter, she bestows it with glory. A vocabulary of marvel surfaces, through compliments that she pays to the flea's '[b]eautez' and 'face divine'.[121] Moving further away from the language of her male counterparts, Catherine notes that this flea finds in her body a 'place honorable'[122] and later a 'sauveguarde',[123] away from danger. Catherine's breast, and indeed her whole body, is transformed into that of a poetic mother; like a mother, Catherine nourishes her child, the flea, with 'Nourriture et enseignement'.[124] The male-dominated salon culture with which she engages is reshaped into a space for admirable women who can speak and change perceptions of a woman's nature. Catherine, as one of these admirable women, uses her dissatisfaction with *blason* writing to define the terms within which she reinvents her body.

Her concentration on the flea allows her to showcase a key female virtue that is attached to modesty: chastity. She now uses her alliance with the flea to highlight her own chastity, not least as a way of appeasing men within her social circle. Certain male advocates and salon attendees of the Des Roches expressed their concern for her refusal to marry. In Pasquier's letter to his friend, Pierre Pithou, he expresses his perplexity at her choice to reject her feminine duty of becoming a wife, especially since she has gained the affection of 'une infinité de personnages d'honneur'.[125] In fact, Catherine has shaped for herself a new

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[119] Ibid., l. 18, p. 336.
[120] Ibid., l. 37, p. 336.
[121] Ibid., ll. 62, 65, p. 338.
[122] Ibid., l. 13, p. 335.
[123] Ibid., l. 89, p. 339.
[124] Ibid., l. 20, p. 336.
[125] Estienne Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Seigneur de Savoye, Advocat en la Cour de Parlement de Paris.', in *Les lettres d'Estienne Pasquier, conseiller et advocat general du roy en la chambre des Comptes de Paris* (Paris: Abel L'Angelier, 1586), pp. 192-93 (p. 193).

destiny as an act of voluntary liberty, in which she joins women like the later scholar Marie de Gournay who choose their own lifestyles, outside of love and marriage.[126] Giving the appearance of conforming to gender norms, Catherine presents herself as a *célibat volontaire* with the play-on words *puce* and *pucelle*, connoting a flea, maiden and virgin. We have already seen her witty pairings of 'sang'/'sein' and 'incarnat'/'delicat'.[127] In these cases she pairs a more delicate image of her breast with more visual and perhaps even more violent notions of blood and crimson. Seizing a language which she has learnt from her male counterparts, she demonstrates a linguistic superiority in her playfulness with it.

The final move in this dance is to reveal that the flea is in fact a young nymph, Syrinx, who seeks to escape the sexual advances of Pan in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Reworking this story, the poet showcases 'female evasion of […] violation';[128] Catherine's assertion that '[elle se] cach[e] subtilement'[129] turns Syrinx's nesting into an innocent plea for help. Moving away from the original, she places Pan within the realm of sexual passion. To Syrinx, she notes:

> [Il] sentit un feu d'affections
> Desirant voste mariage.[130]

The commonplace of 'feu' aligns Pan with Catherine's male opponents, and shows that it is he who tries to take away Syrinx's virginity and modesty. She twists the original version to focus on more positive associations of the female body. She praises the 'vierge courage' of Syrinx who prefers to transform into a flea rather than lose her chastity.[131] The affinity with Catherine is not hard to see: rejecting her numerous admirers, she remains chaste herself.

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[126] Dunn-Lardeau, 'Place de la Comédie', 130.
[127] Roches, 'Puce', ll. 3-4, p. 335.
[128] Todd P. Olson, '*La Femme à la Puce et la Puce à l'Oreille*: Catherine des Roches and the Poetics of Sexual Resistance in Sixteenth-Century French Poetry', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 32.2 (2002), 327-42 (p. 334).
[129] Roches, 'Puce', l. 56, p. 337.
[130] Ibid., ll. 76-77, p. 339.
[131] Ibid., l. 78, p. 339.

This connotation is further strengthened in Syrinx's ascent to a safe place thanks to a fellow female, Diana: an emblem of chastity and an exemplary protector of women. Catherine's body is the source of this solidarity between women. She creates a collaborative community of mythological chaste women, her own group of the *femmes fortes* with which Madeleine previously aligns herself. This forges an air of *orgueil* around the flea's chastity, and by virtue of Catherine's alignment to the flea, her own. By transposing her praise onto the *puce* that is (to echo Bhabha) 'not quite' her, she plays with the possibility of being modest, but speaking about it immodestly.

The notion of a poetic voice is key to this process. There is a clear progression from her own body to the flea's story and finally to her own passion: writing. She mentions her own learned talents to showcase her engagement with her local salon, highlighting the intellectual exchanges that take place there. Her *Puce* is thus revealed to be a product of her collaborative salon life which defines the debate-like structure of her poetic challenge of modesty. It also inspires Catherine to write about her passion for learning:

> Puce, si ma plume étoit digne
> Je décrirois vostre origine[132]

This is an artful strategy of self-abnegation, which creates an image of modesty and self-doubt, a common device which Pender has identified in Mary Sidney's preface to her translation of the *Psalms* of David. Here, Sidney reveals an apology which denies her own authorship. But she has not 'internalized the commands to silence so prevalent' in her culture; her poetry suggests there is something beyond this denial of literary agency.[133] In both Catherine's and Sidney's writing, there is performative modesty at play. They have what Pender calls a 'double discourse', a 'discourse which seems to say one thing while it implies something quite different'.[134] In *Puce*, while the conditional tense suggests that

[132] Ibid., ll. 53-54, p. 337.
[133] Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing*, p. 1.
[134] Ibid., p. 93.

Catherine simply hypothesizes about writing, by writing this down, she has already achieved what she says she cannot. In the same way as we see Sidney's dedication as a 'camouflag[ing] […] assertiveness' with self-abnegation, Catherine also masks her authority.[135] By subsequently detailing the flea's origins she demonstrates that her pen is worthy after all. She signifies a knowability with respect to her body and shows herself to be as accomplished as her male counterparts. Catherine hides her immodesty through self-denial, a veil which presents her as a modest woman.

The *Puce* poem enacts, then, a clear progression from male eroticism to the honourable and inspiring female body and finally to the poet's own, distinctive art of writing. By transposing mythological stories onto more contemporary issues of gender and the female body, Catherine creates a new literary space of imagination which distorts the male *blason* tradition. The location and formative period of the *Grands Jours* within which she flourishes clearly triggers her interest in fighting back against the oppressive tool of modesty. She mobilizes her own body of work in print, the *Puce* alongside other works such as *L'Agnodice*, as we shall see, as a publicly accessible site of learning which counteracts dismissive erotic discourses. Her *Puce* reveals a personal stake in refusing to be categorized as a silent, objectified female; it is a powerful display of agency which challenges and counteracts the ideal type of modesty and her position as a marriageable young *Poitevine*.

b. Deconstructing Modesty: *L'Agnodice* (*Les Œuvres*)

In her analysis of topography in the Des Roches' poetic works, Tarte has argued that Catherine's mythographic poem exploring the figure of *Agnodice*, an ancient Athenian woman who 'passed' as a male doctor in order to establish the discipline of gynaecology, functions as an allegory of Catherine's role in salon society.[136] Foreshadowing *Puce* (1582)

[135] Ibid., p. 93.
[136] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 56.

in its engagement with patriarchal discourses, *L'Agnodice* (1579) unveils a highly individual expression of the condition of the female body with regards to the knowledge of childbirth. Through a process of 'remodeling and remaking' of the original legend, she dismantles the patriarchal account of modesty and celebrates a space in which women reclaim their bodies.[137]

Catherine's version is a thought-provoking revision of the original: she firstly establishes the common specifications of sixteenth-century modesty. As women suffer from a number of 'fiebvres, […] langueurs'[138] which leave them '[a]ymant trop mieux mourir que d'estre peu honteuses', they commit dangerous sacrifices in the name of modesty.[139] Since an allegorical Envy has prevented them from knowing their own bodies, their only option is to reveal their bodies to male physicians, which is against the code of modesty. This dilemma was identified in medical discussions of the time which sought to control women's health at the expense of the women themselves.[140] This is not to say that men necessarily governed childbirth; female midwives dominated the practice to varying degrees. Male *accoucheurs* became more authoritative in the field towards the eighteenth century.[141] Rather, men governed the scientific discourse of childbirth.

The respect for modesty fuelled the fire of already intense debates about the interactions between male physicians and female patients during childbirth at a time when

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[137] Tilde Sankovitch, *French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Access and Desire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 154.
[138] Catherine des Roches, 'L'Agnodice', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 74, p. 336.
[139] Ibid., l. 76, p. 336.
[140] Kirk D. Read, *Birthing Bodies in Early Modern France: Stories of Gender and Production* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 14. Valerie Worth-Stylianou provides a slightly different perspective on male physicians as 'caring' towards women's health compared with later medical practitioners. See Valerie Worth-Stylianou, ed. and trans., *Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France: Treatises by Caring Physicians and Surgeons (1581-1625)*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series, 75 vols (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009-2020), XIII (2013).
[141] See Hilary Marland, *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993); Samuel S. Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery: Splitting the profession, connecting the history', *Journal of Social History*, 43.1 (2009), 115-38; Irvine London, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

women in labour were assisted by female midwives.[142] The surgeon Jacques Duval in 1612 argued for women to cover their body parts during labour to not bring shame to the women and their female birthing assistants.[143] In the realm of treatises, women's bodies became exposed to the invasive male gaze as 'objects of masculine medical knowledge'.[144] As Brancher's study of the *médecin pornographe* reinforces, the female body was the subject of highly sexualized imagery in medical and anatomical texts.[145]

In *L'Agnodice*, it is initially accepted that women wish to retain their modesty because it is expected of them: one might even be encouraged to admire them for their adherence to social norms. However Catherine shifts the tone, by concentrating on the great suffering that women undergo for their sacrifice. To argue this case, she accommodates significant evocation of the erotic in *L'Agnodice*, traces which further exhibit the influence of *poitevin* salon culture on Catherine's depiction of modesty. In the same format as *Puce*, the sensual images conjured up from Agnodice's body represent a veiled dialogue with contemporary poetic traditions related to women's bodies. This is evident when Agnodice firstly conceals her body to practise medicine. Catherine describes the process of covering each part of her body. She dissects Agnodice's body in a *blason*-like fashion, when Agnodice reveals her body to the women:

> [s]on teint doüillet la blanche couleur vive, […]
> [s]on sein poupin le petit mont jumeau, […]
> [s]on chef sacré l'or crepelu tant beau, […]
> [s]es yeux divins les flammes ravissantes[146]

This separation adds to the sensuality of the discourse, encouraging an audience to marvel at the individual parts of Agnodice's youthful body. Here then Catherine plays between the lines of immodesty and modesty to tantalize her audience. In a similar way to *Puce*,

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[142] McTavish, *Childbirth*, pp. 57-58.
[143] Ibid., p. 61.
[144] Ibid., p. 58.
[145] Brancher, *Équivoques*, p. 48.
[146] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', ll. 115-18, p. 337.

Catherine becomes a *médecin pornographe*. But there is a significant difference in this portrayal of sensual images; here, the idealized beloved Agnodice's speech is valued.[147] Catherine calls attention to her 'doux propos' which shatters the image of the silent beloved.[148] When Agnodice exposes her naked body to the men, they are distracted by her justification for learning: '[Ils estoient] [e]ntentifs seulement à l'ouyr et la voir'.[149] This scene 'anticipates Catherine's responses to the male authored poems in *La Puce'*: she wards off the male gaze by 'ignoring the sexual power of the breast'.[150] This is also achieved when she emphasizes the relationship between the breast and poetry.[151] Agnodice's breast is the humble abode of '[d]es Muses, des vertus, des graces, de l'amour'.[152] It is no longer a symbol of eroticism but rather a glorious symbol of poetic beauty, virtue, and love. Again, this is a testament to the fact that Catherine does not acknowledge modesty as a positive force, nor does she tolerate the male gaze employed by her salon peers. By demonstrating two conflicting views within one passage, she creates a literary salon to denounce the objectification of the female body.

This process of subtly flouting convention becomes more apparent when Catherine displays two similar scenes with different results. When stripping in front of the men, Agnodice unveils a 'vierge rougeur',[153] lowering her eyes full of 'honneur et […] honte'.[154] This suggests that female modesty is a fact of nature and it is through nature that she 'remains ashamed and dishonourable'.[155] This part of the story supports the argument fact that blushing may be seen as an uncontrollable passion, and that modesty is therefore an inherent part of a woman's being. This is questioned when we compare this with Agnodice's

[147] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 57.
[148] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', l. 119, p. 337.
[149] Ibid., l. 161, p. 339.
[150] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 57.
[151] Ibid., p. 57.
[152] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', l. 149, p. 339.
[153] Ibid., l. 151, p. 339.
[154] Ibid., l. 150, p. 339.
[155] Yandell, '*Le temps retrouvé*', p. 196.

exposure to fellow women, a similar event to the one mentioned previously. Initially due to the constraints of modesty, the women worry that Agnodice is a man and refuse her entry. However, Agnodice reveals herself after 'voyant leur grande chasteté'[156] as honourable 'femmes et pucelles'.[157] This attention to the women's honourable chastity allows for a connection between them and Agnodice, who is also described as a 'pucelle'.[158] A celebration of Agnodice's body soon follows, in ways that mirror Catherine's body in *Puce*. Once she reveals herself to the women, her initial shame is replaced with honour:

> [Elles] [b]aiserent mille fois […] sa bouche et son sein,
> Recevant le secours de son heureuse main.[159]

Agnodice's body comes to represent trust for them. The women come together to be united as a community. Catherine constructs here female solidarity within a salon of honourable women; through the figure of Agnodice, she establishes a collective life between women in which they should all follow her example and study together. If Agnodice does not experience the same level of shame in the presence of women, this means that she is not naturally supposed to feel shame towards her body; modesty is presented as a form of social control.

Here we may reflect on Ruth Benedict's anthropological theory of shame, as a marker of one's relation to wider society. Shame responds to 'external sanctions', either public ridicule, condemnation or even rejection.[160] It relies on an audience to judge a person's bad behaviour, rather than an internalized, moral conscience in guilt's case, leading to the loss of honour, virtue, and reputation.[161] Shame, then, is a social mechanism; it is not inherently natural for a woman to feel shame towards her body without the influence of

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[156] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', l. 108, p. 337.
[157] Ibid., l. 122, p. 337.
[158] Ibid., l. 170, p. 339.
[159] Ibid., ll. 120-21, p. 337.
[160] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), p. 223.
[161] Ibid., p. 223.

external forces. In *L'Agnodice* Catherine places herself in direct opposition to writers such as Pietro Belmonte who argued that a woman who lost her shame was no longer a woman.[162] She demonstrates that a loss of shame in fact allows women to be better women.

Later, the men's own experience of shame, after initially condemning Agnodice, reflects the possibility of altering women's perceptions of their own bodies and reducing the power that male arbitrators of modesty possess. If we revert back to the depiction of Agnodice's breasts, in the presence of women, they form part of a motherly body. Her breasts connote nourishment, a 'maternal urge of giving and nurturing life', uniting all of her children once again.[163] As we have seen, the women kiss her breast out of admiration; the image symbolizes a child receiving milk, or intellectual nourishment. By becoming a maternal figure she liberates these women to enjoy maternity. Through knowledge, Agnodice allows women to have an active role in the process. Her naked exposure is the key to restoring communal health and wellbeing.

Catherine takes this further to suggest that a woman may heal other women with her knowledge; she creates a community of women healers and women healed. Aware of the limits of her female body, Agnodice becomes an androgynous figure: she temporarily rejects her female body to liberate other bodies. Hiding behind male clothes, she performs an accepted form of masculinity that allows her to enter the sphere of medicine. She shows that she is just as capable of demonstrating a gift for knowledge as the men. However, Catherine suggests that, initially, at least, Agnodice can only be taken seriously when she cross-dresses as a man.

Drawing on Luce Irigaray's theory of mimicry now, as distinct from that of Bhabha, we may see that Catherine uses 'already existing systems of meaning of signification', in

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[162] Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 100.
[163] Sankovitch, *French Women Writers*, p. 64.

this case that of modesty and the distribution of knowledge along gendered lines, 'to exceed or overflow the […] hierarchizing procedures of phallocentric texts'.[164] She not only parodies masculine discourses of modesty from within, she also opposes, transgresses, and transcends them with her own take on the female body. This is achieved by stressing that modesty and the lack of female education have led to the women's ill health, and the breakdown of feminine solidarity. The role of Envy is key in this process. Catherine sets out the damaging backlash against learned women which this allegorical figure inspires:

> Tu semas en la terre une race feconde
> D'ires, de cruautez, de geines, et de morts
> Qui font aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts.[165]

Within her creative story Catherine addresses her opponents in French society, by way of violent vocabulary: 'devorer', 'le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy', 'le chagrin et l'ennuy', 'venin', 'rage'.[166] Here we find an interesting reworking of Madeleine's civil war tropes, which we have already seen, in respect of envy and the sowing of discord. Catherine suggests that Envy is a poisonous snake, a predator seeping venom into society. Envy's perpetrators, as expected, are none other than men, namely husbands who are 'les tyrans de leurs femmes' prohibiting them from learning.[167] The women no longer dare to 'se mesler';[168] instead, feeling alienated, they retreat back to spinning in their own private and isolated spaces: 'on les faisoit filler'.[169] The use of the semi-modal verb here reveals that they do not necessarily wish to remain in the domestic sphere but because of modesty they have been forced to do so. Modesty is revealed as the cultural by-product of masculine anxieties and inadequacies surrounding the possible superiority of learned women. When

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[164] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 176. See especially Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1977), pp. 73-75.
[165] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', ll. 27-29, p. 334.
[166] Ibid., ll. 10, 17, 21, 23, p. 333.
[167] Ibid., l. 62, p. 335.
[168] Ibid., l. 78, p. 336.
[169] Ibid., l. 79, p. 336.

Catherine alludes to the women surrounding Agnodice, she incites pity, for their husbands laugh and jeer at them. Reworking this intolerable situation, she imagines by way of the salon, and by way of Agnodice's community of women, her own utopian space.

Within Agnodice's story, Catherine challenges the monstrous perception of learned women as unruly and unnatural in sixteenth-century French society.[170] It is no coincidence that she treats this theme, for Agnodice is a reflection of her poetic creator. When referring to Agnodice's character, the poem demonstrates her 'rares vertus', words which male peers from her salon network often use to describe Catherine.[171] Using these terms Agnodice becomes an exemplary figure, so then Catherine becomes a role model in real life. Throughout *L'Agnodice* she stresses the 'plus digne ornament' that is learning.[172] To take learning away from her, and indirectly Catherine, would be to 'offencer nature' itself.[173] When the men listen to Agnodice's (and thus Catherine's) eloquent case, they are impressed: a personal case expands outwards and argues that all women could become authors. Playing on the term 'authoriser', Catherine sanctions their wish to learn, and by transposing her own salon onto her fictionalized setting, she both endorses her own activities and celebrates a female-centred space.[174] Modesty is discarded in favour of allowing learned women to flourish. Extending her mother's arguments, Catherine also demonstrates a second benefit of women's education to society through the theme of healing. Knowledge is praised because it creates the space for women to recover from suffering and seek joy through learning.

Agnodice's authority in medicine also raises the question of a woman's knowledge of her own fertile body. She substitutes midwifery for motherhood. In this respect she

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[170] Parker, 'Magnificence', 265.
[171] Roches, 'L'Agnodice', l. 177, p. 340.
[172] Ibid., l. 68, p. 335.
[173] Ibid., l. 156, p. 339.
[174] Ibid., l. 153, p. 339.

anticipates Louise Bourgeois, the experienced early modern medical author and royal midwife, whose manuals (*Observations diverses*, 1609), the first of their kind by a midwife, establish a woman's sense of her own body during childbirth, 'as a site of maternal knowledge'.[175] Both support women's ability to conceptualize their reproductive bodies through personal experience and, alongside Catherine, they reflect the authority to write about the female body. Bourgeois uses her manuals to express her calling to medicine, in ways that mirror Catherine's self-proclaimed pursuit of learning. Bourgeois also makes clear that as an expert in her field, her practice is not just a trade but also an art.[176] Catherine, her poetic counterpart Agnodice, and her real-life successor Bourgeois, openly discuss birthing and facilitate the act itself. They take part in maternal discourses and they become honorary mothers to women, granting them the freedom to take control of their bodies. This concept of motherhood is a powerful tool for Catherine for it convinces her public that she may still adopt a motherly role despite the reality of her position as a deliberately childless woman. This alternative maternal discourse, as we shall explore, forms an important part of the mother-daughter collaborative network between Catherine and Madeleine.

The debates and discussions of the Des Roches' salon characterize a particular unpicking of what it means to be a (im)modest woman. Catherine follows her mother's lead in deconstructing patriarchal discourses which seek to restrict women. But while Madeleine deflects attention from her own immodesty as a writer in print, Catherine openly liberates and extols the female body. She undermines modesty and suggests a less oppressive way of living as her poems combine to forge an image of a woman and her surrounding community.[177] The *poitevin* salon therefore becomes the site of complex play between

[175] McTavish, *Childbirth*, p. 103.
[176] Wendy Perkins, *Midwifery and Medicine in Early Modern France: Louise Bourgeois* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 140-41.
[177] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 59.

modesty sustained and moments of resistance. We may be inclined, in Larsen's words, to call this 'conciliatory feminism'.[178]

If even the act of writing about the body is arguably immodest in sixteenth-century society, any such writing by women might seem to be doubly so. The entry of Madeleine and Catherine into print, an exclusively male space and practice that is seen to be a 'lower-class activity', is a controversial move and yet, as scholarship has shown, these women were highly respected during and after their lifetime.[179] How did they manage to escape public criticism? This is achieved by means of collaborative modesty, most notably, the mother-daughter network.

II.i. A Strategic Weapon: The Mother-Daughter Bond

Without denying that the Des Roches had an authentic bond, it is possible to show that they also made use of their mother-daughter bond within the rhetoric of exemplarity to mirror the identities that male writers had already formed of and for them. As we know, the mother-daughter relationship was a powerful topos which became an important theme, recovered in the following century. The more public connection between the Des Roches women in their works sets them apart from Marguerite's relationship with her daughter, confronted as they had been with the political forces of royal marriage. Indeed, Catherine's intervention in collaborative modesty is integral to the public identity that she forms with her mother during their lifetime in order to conceal or counteract their immodesty in print. Their mother-daughter relationship became commonplace in dedications during and after their lifetime; it was a profoundly visible part of their public image, as shown in Madeleine de Scudéry's discussion in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets* (1684), labelling them as 'la mere'

[178] Anne R. Larsen, 'Les Dames des Roches: The French Humanist Scholars', in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, pp. 232-59 (p. 239).
[179] Wall, *Imprint*, p. 281.

and '[l]a fille'.[180] Even later in an eighteenth-century lithograph, the Des Roches are shown to look at each other fondly as emblems of their affectionate family unit. The act of printing their works as a shared project is a truly remarkable and rare phenomenon of the time, which allowed the women to construct a joint identity veiling two distinctive, highly vocal voices.



Figure 5. Anonymous, eighteenth-century lithograph of Les Dames des Roches (Collection Laruelle, vol. 106), reproduced in Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues and Letters of Les Dames des Roches*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006), p. xxix.

a. Constructing Maternal-Filial Relations: The Des Roches' Mutual Dedications

In her study of early modern prefaces, Anne R. Larsen has shown that the preface is not just a paratext, it is a 'codified genre' in which women writers legitimize their uncommon decision to print their works.[181] The Des Roches stage their mother-daughter bond through the prefaces that they dedicate to each other. The public therefore pushes against the private: mother-daughter intimacy is framed within a keen awareness of a public audience, even as

[180] Madeleine de Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets, dediées au Roy*, 2 vols (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), II, pp. 791-97, in Roches et al., *Missives*, pp. 377-80 (p. 378).
[181] Larsen, '"*Un honneste passetems*"', 11.

the public offering of their work is recast as a personal exchange between a mother and daughter. It is a staged endeavour which allows the women to amplify not only the importance of companionship, motherly guidance, and daughterly obedience, but also the ways in which they faithfully conform to traditional religious, family, and social norms.[182] As we shall see, the difference of possessive pronouns in these dedications – Madeleine's choice of 'ma' and Catherine's use of 'sa' – ensure that the daughter collaborates with her mother, whilst also subtly distancing herself to acquire a more individualized identity in their joint works. The image of a loving family bond is fabricated by highlighting four aspects of their relationship: first, mutual affection, second, virtuous upbringing, third, companionship, and finally, parenthood.

The complexity of thematizing kinship and womanhood in a fictional setting and in dedications is given extra reinforcement by the mother-daughter duo's admiration of each other's virtues. In Madeleine's *Epistre a ma Fille* (*Œuvres*), she cannot be any more explicit in her praise of Catherine's virtue: she declares herself in awe of her daughter's heart which is naturally 'né à la vertu'.[183] She goes on to complement her poise, control of speech, and countenance. Comparatively, Catherine stresses Madeleine's similar 'admirables vertus' in her *Epistre a sa Mere* (*Secondes Œuvres*), which guide her on the right path to her own virtue.[184] This theme of guidance towards the 'straight and narrow' path is directly taken from Madeleine's epistle. The women cite each other's virtues to promote the idea of mutual inspiration and thus mutual blame, if any blame is to be shared. In this way, they are more similar than different, and do not seem so obviously and frightfully independent from each other. Their virtue grants them literary immortality. Madeleine especially grants Catherine this privilege; she refers to the great 'honneur'[185] that she will receive thanks to her 'vertu

[182] Ibid., p. 20.
[183] Madeleine des Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, l. 14, p. 81.
[184] Catherine des Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', in Roches et al., *Secondes Œuvres*, p. 121.
[185] Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', l. 66, p. 84.

immortelle'.[186] This immortality is also a reflection of Madeleine's wish for Catherine to become a respected poet. As Catherine is well aware herself, there are 'assez d'hommes qui escrivent, mais peu de filles se meslent d'un tel exercice', and it is her fervent wish to be one of these happy few.[187]

The profoundly close bond that the pair share is strengthened by references to the virtuous and moral upbringing that Madeleine has provided for her daughter. Both parties refer to this in their dedications. Madeleine is presented as a dutiful mother who provides her child with a suitable moral education; in return, Catherine is virtuous for putting this education into practice. In her preface to the *Missives*, Madeleine proclaims Catherine to be a gift from God; she is born in the image of the divine spirit and so possesses the same virtues as him.[188] Combined with the metaphor of a portrait, Catherine is also made in the image of her own mother. Madeleine has taught her all of the valuable moral lessons to be a well-raised young woman. Parroting Vives's views, Madeleine sheds light on her understanding of chastity as an 'ornement à la femme', which matches Eve's own thoughts on the virtue.[189] In her *Epistre aux Dames* (*Œuvres*) she also cites silence as traditionally part of a female's being.[190] She does this to demonstrate that these considerations have been a strong part of Catherine's moral and social formation. Her preface to the *Œuvres* puts this into practice and it suggests that Madeleine's entry into print has not diminished her duty.

In response, in her dedication to her mother, Catherine admires the wisdom that her mother has offered her, vowing that she could 'suivre [son] exemple de vertu', but to remain modest she could not emulate it.[191] Beyond this she conflates virtue with learning; even through studying she has maintained her virtue, unlike 'les autres filles [qui] mettent à visiter

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[186] Ibid., l. 67, p. 84.
[187] Catherine des Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, p. 183.
[188] Madeleine des Roches, 'Epistre a Ma Fille', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 84.
[189] Ibid., p. 86.
[190] See Madeleine des Roches, 'Epistre aux Dames', in Roches et al., *Œuvres*, p. 79.
[191] Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', p. 181.

les compaignies pour estre veües de leurs plus gentils serviteurs'.[192] She complies with Vives's wish for women to remain within the private sphere as often as possible and away from sexual temptation.[193] Like Madeleine, she demonstrates that 'la lettre accroist le cueur du vertueux'.[194] She is determined to '[s]e corriger' as a writer which will strengthen her virtue.[195] Moreover, her writing does not prevent a woman writer from fulfilling her domestic duties. Catherine echoes Pasquier's observations in his letter to Pithou whereby the Des Roches women complete their household chores before engaging in writing; she makes clear that her writing is done during '[s]a plus grande oisiveté'.[196] She commits herself to 'pelotons, […] la laine [et] la soye'; she assures her mother, and indirectly her public readers, that she has not rejected womanly tasks for her writerly pen.[197]

As we will learn in more depth in Chapter 4, there is a clear mirroring between the Des Roches' dedications and the identities constructed by their male supporters. The women creatively mimic, here as in the poems that follow, male discourses, in a sophisticated game of dissimulation and revelation, in which calls to modesty are expressed through immodest means. In both discourses, the mutual affection between mother and daughter is promoted. In an almost theatrical display of her protectiveness, Madeleine names Catherine 'fille qui m'es si proche'[198] and spends the majority of her epistle highlighting the 'si parfaict'[199] love that she has towards her. The regular use of possessive pronouns and the informal address of 'toi' stress intimacy as well as possession. This display of affection is brought into dialogue with Catherine's own epistle in the *Secondes Œuvres*. Catherine's assertion that Madeleine is the 'vie de [s]a vie' suggests an inseparability between mother and daughter.[200]

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[192] Ibid., p. 183.
[193] Vives, *Livre*, p. 87.
[194] Roches, 'Epistre a Ma Fille', l. 22, p. 82.
[195] Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', p. 181.
[196] Ibid., p. 185.
[197] Ibid., pp. 184-85.
[198] Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', l. 11, p. 81.
[199] Ibid., l. 38, p. 82.
[200] Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', p. 119.

We find the same theme in Catherine's dedication in the *Missives*. Professing a happiness which prevents her from distancing herself from her mother, she highlights her own filial obedience. She publicly pledges to always be 'proche, prompte, humble, et devote pour [la] servir'.[201] She refers to the great education that Madeleine has offered her, a matter that Sainte-Marthe and Pasquier especially admire in their letters and dedications. Sainte-Marthe, in particular, signals his 'admiration de voir la Mere instruire la fille', and – in concert with Madeleine's own discourse – praises the mother's transformation of her daughter into a beautiful and virtuous daughter.[202] Vives's *Livre* highlights the importance of the mother-daughter bond, arguing that the mother should 'estime[r] la fille mieulx estre sienne',[203] whilst the daughter must demonstrate 'l'amour filialle' and 'se doit rendre obeyssante'.[204] The Des Roches appear publicly as textbook examples of a perfect (if fatherless) early modern family, showing that they do not stray from their duties in the realm of print.

The framework of companionship equally softens their transgression into the public sphere. Contrary to the assertion that their letters are 'embellished greeting cards',[205] they are skilfully crafted literary pieces which incorporate the letter writing styles of humanists, reworking for instance the courtly *lettre mondaine*, itself inspired by the epistolary work of secretaries such as Etienne du Troncher.[206] Catherine's keen awareness of audience is shown in her letter to Abel L'Angelier regarding the publication of the *Missives*, in which she and her mother allow him to choose the final title of the work which would best incite the

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[201] Catherine des Roches, 'A ma Mere', in Roches et al., *Missives* p. 147.
[202] Scévole de Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges des Hommes illustres, qui depuis un siècle ont fleury en France dans la profession des Lettres. Composez en Latin […] et mis en François, par G. Colletet*, trans. by G. Colletet (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1644) pp. 339-41, in Roches et al., *Missives*, pp 361-63 (p. 361).
[203] Vives, *Livre*, p. 22.
[204] Ibid., p. 122.
[205] Janet G. Altman, 'The Letter Book as a Literary Institution 1539-1789: Toward a Cultural History of Published Correspondences in France', *Yale French Studies*, 71 (1986), 17-62 (p. 26).
[206] Anne R. Larsen, 'Madeleine des Roches (1520?-November 1587?) and Catherine des Roches (December 1542-November 1587?)', in *Sixteenth-Century French Writers*, ed. by Megan Conway, Dictionary of Literary Biography, 387 vols (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1978-2021), CCCXXVII (2006), pp. 128-32 (p. 132).

'curiosité des hommes'.[207] Her choice to contact L'Angelier in the first place, a notable Parisian printer, rather than a local printer in Poitiers, a city with a prolific Protestant printing press, reveals the women's willingness to be noticed, and to work with a Catholic press. Catherine calls on L'Angelier to throw any of her works which he deems unworthy into the fire. This is immediately followed by an appeal to him to remember the Des Roches' good faith. It is a strategic discourse which allows the women to appear humble while subtly promoting their work and their virtuous nature.

Moreover, Catherine and Madeleine include moments of solidarity in their correspondence; often Catherine concludes her letters with 'ma Mere et moy [vous] saluons'.[208] In parallel with her daughter, Madeleine reminds her interlocutors, 'vous […] que ma Fille et moy salüons de bon cueur'.[209] In their correspondence, the roles of mother and daughter are fixed identities. Repeating these labels only strengthen their public and private closeness. In their dedications they show that they are a united front: as Madeleine guides the two of them, Catherine happily follows. In the *Secondes Œuvres*, Madeleine reveals her unwavering insistence on their togetherness, instructing her daughter to walk together 'en cete union qui nous a toujours maintenues'.[210] She hopes that God will guide the works so that the 'parole de[s] deux' will prevent them from receiving public slander.[211] Catherine demonstrates her loyalty to Madeleine in her epistle in *Secondes Œuvres*: 'je vous suy partout comme l'ombre le cors'.[212] Such carefully choreographed collaborative modesty is a staged practice. While Madeleine seems to lead the two, there are also moments where Catherine shares the same level of importance, providing equal support to her own mother.

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[207] Catherine des Roches, '70', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 211.
[208] Catherine des Roches, '58', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 200.
[209] Madeleine des Roches, '12', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 103.
[210] Roches, 'A ma Fille', p. 87.
[211] Ibid., p. 87.
[212] Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', p. 119.

Madeleine is, for instance, explicitly thankful for their union and Catherine's 'force',[213] which, she states, has given her the courage to 'parler en public' and determination to ensure that her ill health does not hinder their joint project.[214] In contrast with her poetic self-depiction, she is empowered by Catherine's will to push back against her ill health.

Thus, while giving the initial impression of a mother guiding her daughter, the women's relationship is more balanced than meets the eye. While they may be breaking into the male sphere of print, they do so with control, care, and under mutual guidance. This mother-daughter relationship is a particularly intimate inflection of the female literary communities that Tarte locates in her important study.[215] As if echoing Labé's own encouragement of intellectual Dames *lyonnaises*, Madeleine also calls on contemporary *Poitevines* to write.[216] In the Des Roches' mutual dedications, the women create, in contemporary terms, their own female intellectual space, expanding outwards to other women.

b. Fashioning the Family in Fiction: *Le Ravissement de Proserpine* (*Les Missives*)

These dedications which promote a maternal-filial solidarity are a prelude to their works. This is clearly demonstrated in Catherine's adaptation of Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinæ*, a creative enterprise exploring parental-filial relations. This work details Proserpine's abduction by Pluto to the underworld, tearing her away from her mother Ceres. Catherine personalizes Claudian's story to emphasize the remarkably close mother-daughter relationship of Proserpine and Ceres, clearly modelled on that of Madeleine and Catherine. In her *Ravissement*, an anxiety of separation is exhibited through Ceres's distress at losing her daughter to a tyrannical man who forces her to marry him. By the end of the story,

[213] Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', p. 85.
[214] Ibid., pp. 85, 87.
[215] Kendall B. Tarte, 'Early Modern Literary Communities: Madeleine Des Roches's City of Women', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 35.3 (2004), 751-69 (p. 754).
[216] Ibid., 751.

Catherine's version, like that of Claudian, ends with Ceres searching hopelessly for her lost Proserpine.

Marianne Hirsch has argued that the mother-daughter relationship in Lafayette's *Clèves* is a counterpoint to a 'heterosexual economy of exchange'; Ceres and Proserpine's close mother-daughter relationship is directly opposed to that very same economy.[217] Ceres is Madeleine's literary equivalent; her relationship to Catherine is one of love and ownership. This may be seen in Catherine's vocabulary when she affirms that Proserpine has been 'prise à sa Mere'.[218] As her only child, Proserpine is her mother's dearest treasure. This, Leah Chang has argued, is an example of Proserpine's objectification. She is transformed by Ceres into an 'object or product of unique value' which serves to increase her honour and worth.[219] Upon Ceres's loss, Catherine portrays her as crying, restless and filled with desperation. This example of maternal loss is given more importance than the abduction itself. Ceres is often shown to use the same vocabulary as Madeleine in her dedications, referring to Proserpine as '[s]on ame, ô [s]on tout'.[220] By transposing this onto Madeleine's and Catherine's relationship, this intensifies their will to remain together in reality and in fiction.

If we are to take Proserpine's and Ceres's relationship as the fictional version of Madeleine and Catherine's bond, then Proserpine represents Catherine. We find references that may suggest this, such as Proserpine's closeness to her mother and her dedication to her domestic duties. This is most apparent when Ceres hopelessly looks at 'le fuseau, l'eguille,

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[217] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 21; Sankovitch, 'The Body', p. 64.
[218] Catherine des Roches, 'Le Ravissement de Proserpine pris de Claude Clodian', 'Le Premier Livre', in Roches et al., *Missives*, l. 61, p. 215.
[219] Leah L. Chang, 'Catherine Des Roches' Two Proserpines: Textual Production and the "Ravissement De Proserpine" in the Missives De Mes-Dames Des Roches (1586)', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 58.4 (2005), 203-22 (p. 210).
[220] Roches, 'Ravissement', 'Le Troisieme Livre', l. 553, p. 285.

la quenouille'[221] and the 'chaste lit',[222] which Proserpine has left behind. The latter is a theme which appears in Catherine's poem *A ma quenouille*, which addresses her loyalty to the pen and the spindle as representatives of recreational and domestic duties, respectively. Moreover, Catherine's description of Proserpine as 'une fille pudique' is perhaps a hint at her own modesty.[223] The commentary on Proserpine's 'lignage, […] vertus, et [...] beautez' in relation to Ceres further suggests that Catherine/Proserpine reflects the same qualities as Madeleine/Ceres.[224]

Throughout *Ravissement*, Catherine refers to Ceres's determination for Proserpine to remain chaste. She notes that the 'tendre pudeur […] [d]'une honteuse crainte' prevents Proserpine from desiring marriage.[225] It is an explicit reference to modesty, further revealed by remarks about Proserpine's 'vierge rougeur'[226] and 'chaste lit'.[227] When Pluto snatches her away from her mother, Catherine is quick to note Proserpine's loss of modesty ('Ma honte est desrobée') not due to a fault that she has committed, but rather because of Pluto's tyrannical actions.[228] He is representative of certain vicious men in society who try to shame women, snatching their virginity to quench their own sexual appetites. Catherine reveals a double standard: men dictate the rules of modesty and expect honourable women to uphold it, yet these same men try and take this away from them. In her *Ravissement*, Catherine establishes herself and her mother as modest women and places herself in the framework of maternal-filial love.

The presentation of *Ravissement* reveals an even more complex manipulation of the mother-daughter relationship, specifically on the part of Catherine, and her own connection

[221] Ibid., 'Le Troisieme Livre', l. 205, p. 269.
[222] Ibid., 'Le Troisieme Livre', l. 207, p. 269.
[223] Ibid., 'Le Premier Livre', l. 189, p. 222.
[224] Ibid., 'Le Premier Livre', l. 190, p. 222.
[225] Ibid., 'Le Premier Livre', ll. 203-04, p. 223.
[226] Ibid., 'Le Premier Livre', l. 398, p. 233.
[227] Ibid., 'Le Troisieme Livre', l. 207, p. 269.
[228] Ibid., 'Le Second Livre', l. 341, p. 251.

with motherhood. We locate a manipulation of the parenting topos in which she addresses herself as a parent of literary children. As we see in her letter to Abel L'Angelier, initially Catherine reinforces the identity of Proserpine as '[l]a fille de Cerise' who desires 'en esperance'[229] to find L'Angelier and for him to 'humblement la recevoir'.[230] Her allegiance to Proserpine suggests that this may reveal her own desire to approach L'Angelier, a man of the public sphere, who can offer her a secure transition into print. It also leaves open the opportunity for her and L'Angelier to 'faire paroistre au Soleil', or to print, future publications, especially the *Missives*.[231] The picture becomes more intricate in Catherine's letter when she later asks him to be a 'parrain' to this vulnerable daughter.[232] She asks L'Angelier to take care of not only her as Proserpine, but also her work, which she also calls Proserpine. Catherine does not displace her mother as her guardian, but rather recognizes the reality of needing a male collaborator to accompany her works into print. Indirectly, then, Catherine fashions herself as L'Angelier's *fille d'alliance*.

More intriguingly, by also transforming Proserpine into a text and child, Catherine identifies herself as a mother. Adding to Chang's discussion of Madeleine's maternal possession of Catherine, we can see that Catherine draws on herself as the orchestrator of her own literary progeny, allowing her to exert a form of control in maternal discourses. If we return to Pasquier's concern about Catherine's unmarried and therefore childless status, Catherine's use of the book-as-child topos is a solution to this perceived problem. As Wes Williams has noted, Montaigne in his dedication of *De l'affection des peres aux enfans* of the *Essais* (Book II, 1580) to Madame d'Estissac, will express his desire for this exemplary mother to look after his child of his own mind, his work.[233] Robert Cottrell has shown this

[229] Roches, '70', p. 210.
[230] Ibid., p. 210.
[231] Madeleine des Roches, '19', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 109.
[232] Ibid., p. 211.
[233] See Michel de Montaigne, 'De l'affection des peres aux enfans', in *Essais*, *Livre II*, ed. by Alexandre Micha, 3 vols (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969-1979), II (1969), pp. 56-57; Wes Williams, 'Back to the Future: "*Les*

to be favouritism, on Montaigne's part, towards a noble figurative child as a seed sown in the reader's mind that goes on to grow into something richer than the parent text.[234] Antoine Compagnon pays more attention to the narcissistic, incestuous love of Montaigne's literary offspring, pointing to the conflation between Montaigne the subject and his literary reflection.[235] Similarly, Richard Regosin has shown the book-as-child topos to be an effective way of thinking about Montaigne's fashioning of his writerly self.[236] Within his own patriarchal ideology of fathering a male child, his self is a source of Montaigne's life and death; his *Essais* speak for and displace Montaigne in his absence.[237]

When we apply this notion of selfhood to Catherine, her works do reflect her own self: *L'Agnodice* and *Puce* reflect her own understandings of her status as a learned woman in patriarchal society, as well as the connotations of her female body. However, this topos of the book as a child becomes more complicated when used by a woman who sets herself up as consciously childless. Firstly, the birth of her artistic progeny helps to concretize her claim for immortality; she demonstrates the possibility for literature to be an important medium to forge an afterlife for her. In her dedication to her mother in *Œuvres*, she mentions a wish to be remembered as one of the 'nombre de peu', one of the few women who write and print their works during her lifetime.[238] By producing literary offspring, her works give her the means to leave something for prosperity, and to entrench herself in the memory of present and future writers.

Enfantements de Nostre Esprit"', in *Pre-Histories and Afterlives: Studies in Critical Method* Holland, ed. by Anna Holland and Richard Scholar (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 121-35 (p. 122).

[234] Robert D. Cottrell, *Sexuality/Textuality: A Study of the Fabric of Montaigne's Essais* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1981), p. 131.

[235] Antoine Compagnon, *Nous, Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 217.

[236] Richard L. Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's Essais as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 154.

[237] See Richard L. Regosin, *Montaigne's Unruly Brood: Textual Engendering and The Challenge to Paternal Authority* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 13-47.

[238] Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', p. 183.

More importantly, the book-as-child topos is a strategic device; literary motherhood becomes a means of influence and possession. The topos validates Catherine's life to a public audience. As a childless woman Catherine establishes a comparison between birthing and creating art in order to compensate for her lack of real children; she seems maternal without actually jeopardizing her wish to stay unmarried. She destabilizes the traditional model of the heterosexual nuclear family to offer an alternative vision of kinship in which only one person, the mother, is needed. Such compensation is not for her own sake; it is to reassure her public that she remains loyal to gender norms by carrying out her duty as a woman: fashioning herself as a creative mother of *Ravissement* or as Catherine calls it 'Proserpine', she figuratively exerts a form of control over continuing the family line for Madeleine. As an outsider of pronatalism, she excuses her entry into a male-dominate sphere within a socially engrained gender specific discourse of maternity. Within this traditionally male book-as-child topos, Catherine conflates the real with the figurative, and forges her own feminine stance on literary motherhood which establishes for her an afterlife in an imagined space of legacy.

Even for Catherine, this imagined immortality is part of a larger collective life formed alongside her mother. Madeleine is no longer a producer of children, and yet, due to Catherine's self-fashioning as a creative mother of literary children, she returns to familiar territory for an early modern woman. As one of the Dames des Roches, Catherine's life was bound to that of her mother. Her literary progeny continues a legacy started by her mother and so, she becomes Madeleine's own 'book-as-child', or bookish child. At times, Madeleine herself acts as a substitute father figure, by accompanying Catherine's creative births in their joint works, but in the case of *Ravissement*, it is L'Angelier, a male protector, who is asked to take on guardianship. Bhabha's theory of mimicry is once again useful here in understanding Catherine's writing. Like the colonized writer, she seizes an authoritative

strategy: she creates a difference which is 'itself a process of disavowal'.[239] She takes on accepted discourses of the mother-daughter bond in a way that is 'almost the same but not quite'.[240] Catherine presents a mimetic paradox within the common discourse of motherhood, pushing the boundaries of how a woman can be a mother without physically giving birth. This highly significant performative device situates her in the sphere of female domesticity and allows her to appear as less of a defiant figure. This rhetoric validates her literary ventures as well as her claim to be emancipated from the constraints of real-life motherhood that society places on women.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how Madeleine and Catherine, despite the limitations of modesty, transgress the boundaries of patriarchal discourses to strip the primarily male-defined concept of its power and reformulate it for their own uses. They are representative of the ability to create their own responses which draw on religious conflict, illness and old age for Madeleine, and for Catherine, associations between the female body and knowledge.

I have identified a topography or geographical specificity to Madeleine's manipulation of the topoi and tropes of modesty in which Poitiers is revealed to be an important space of influence. Catherine's response to modesty, in contrast, is disclosed within the context of her local *poitevin* salon of which she draws inspiration to launch her own thought-provoking debates and discussions. In both cases, Madeleine and Catherine embrace 'intersections of place, history and community', to construct highly individualized accounts of what it means for a learned woman's modesty to be compromised in sixteenth-century Poitiers.[241]

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[239] Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry', p. 122
[240] Ibid., p. 122.
[241] Tarte, *Writing Places*, p. 218.

Such expressions of modesty become more complex in the face of collaborative modesty. The Des Roches entrench themselves within the framework of feminine duty and shrewdly emulate already-existing discourses of male collaborators. While their voices remain sharply distinct, we find several moments in which their joint identity comes to the forefront in the form of their mother-daughter bond. In their mutual dedications and Catherine's literary depictions of motherhood, we discover that Madeleine and Catherine, especially, shield their individual responses to modesty with a veil of maternal-filial affection.

A figure whose daughters also feature in her publication history is Gabrielle de Coignard. Her responses to modesty sit between the religious Marguerite and the widowed Madeleine. Much like the localized accounts that we have already come across in Nérac and Poitiers, Coignard's poet commentary is shaped by her local surroundings. The Catholic bastion of Toulouse and the intimate space of her *cabinet* reveal an intriguing poetic re-imagining of the female body, as well as the justification of Coignard's poetic talents by her daughters, Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal. This leads me to Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Gabrielle de Coignard: Religion, Desire, and The *Cabinet* in Late Sixteenth-Century Toulouse

Introduction

Little is known about Coignard other than a few details about her upbringing, marriage, and family life. She was born around 1550 into an elite parliamentary family in Toulouse. Her father, Jean de Coignard, became a *conseiller au Parlement* in 1543; before 1542 he married Louise de Baulac who was the daughter of Jean de Caulac, another *conseiller au Parlement*.[242] Jean was also a long-serving master of the celebrated *Jeux Floraux*, a literary competition which enticed a number of esteemed writers and poets to Toulouse, including Pierre de Ronsard and Guillaume du Bartas.[243] His daughter Gabrielle's social status was enhanced substantially in 1570 on her marriage to Pierre de Mansencal, future *Président du Parlement de Toulouse*. Their children, Jeanne and Catherine, were predominantly raised by Coignard after her husband's death just three years into their marriage. She was also placed in charge of a number of properties which she inherited from her husband and her side of the family, from whom most of her wealth derived.[244] Most notably, she inherited a couple of houses which were located in Toulouse and some tenant farms which were bequeathed to her daughters, among other items, following her death in 1586.[245]

It was the devastating loss of her husband which Coignard implies led her to write devotional poetry – one hundred and twenty nine *sonnets spirituels* and twenty-one *vers*

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[242] Pierre Salies, 'Gabrielle de Coignard: poétesse toulousaine du XVI[e] siècle', *Archistra* (March-April, 1987), 79, 33-43 (pp. 34, 36).
[243] P. Davies, 'Jeux Floraux de Toulouse', in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 414. See also Deborah L. Baker, 'Gabrielle de Coignard's "Sonnets spirituels": Writing Passion within and against the Petrarchan Tradition', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 38.3 (2015), 41-59 (p. 44).
[244] Salies, 'Gabrielle de Coignard', p. 42.
[245] Ibid., p. 40.

chrestiens – as a kind of consolation.[246] Keeping her work sequestered in what I refer to as her 'cabinet toulousain', an intimate room in which she wrote poetry, Coignard did not have her poetry published during her lifetime. In a sonnet, she urged her poems to remain, 'coys dedans [s]on cabinet'.[247] Her *Œuvres chrestiennes* were first published in 1594, under the direction of her two daughters who were in their twenties at the time. With this publication, they paid homage to their mother, a 'Dame devotieuse', admired both for her literary talents and her religious ardour.[248] Intriguingly, despite presenting their mother in relation to their father as the 'Vefve a feu Monsieur de Mansencal Sieur de Miremont', no doubt for concerns about status, he is not discussed at all in their dedication.[249] Instead, space is given to the mother, who leaves them with grief and her poems. It is this mother-daughter bond which facilitates Coignard's posthumous entry into print; this shall be discussed in the final section of this chapter.


OEVVRES
CHESTIENNES
DE FEV
Dame GABRIELLE
de Coignard.
Vefue a feu Monſieur de Manſencal
Sieur de Miremont, Preſident
en la Cour de Parle-
ment de To-
loſe.
A TOLOSE,
Par Pierre Iagourt, & Bernard Carles,
1594.

Figure 6. Title page of Gabrielle de Coignard, *Œuvres chrestiennes* (Toulouse: Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles, 1594), in Colette H. Winn, 'Introduction', in Gabrielle de Coignard, *Œuvres chrétiennes*, ed. by Colette H. Winn (Geneva: Droz, 1995), pp. 13-126 (p. 119).

[246] Léon Feugère, *Les femmes poëtes au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1860), p. 35.
[247] Gabrielle de Coignard, '14', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 1, p. 52.
[248] Jeanne de Mansencal and Catherine de Mansencal, 'Aux Dames devotieuses', in Gabrielle de Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets: A Bilingual* Edition, ed. and trans. by Melanie E. Gregg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 34.
[249] Kenny, *Born to Write*, p. 80.

Coignard's intellectual upbringing coincided with the economic and intellectual flourishing of Toulouse. At the time, it was perceived to be the 'grande capitale bourgeoise, intellectuelle [et] artistique' of its region.[250] Commerce had grown considerably with the production of *pastel*, and the influx of precious metals, supported by the influence of the *bourgeoisie* of the city.[251] The *Parlement de Toulouse* was awarded much more control over its region and many of its members encouraged an interest in the arts. Academic vigour also flourished in the university and the various law schools in Toulouse.[252] The early humanist movement encouraged magistrates, students, and ecclesiastical figures to partake in scholarly debate, and the city quickly attracted prominent humanists.[253] Toulouse's printing press was established at the end of the fifteenth century; it was the fourth French city to develop this industry, and it soon began to thrive.[254] Pierre Jagourt, a particularly prolific printer, printed Coignard's posthumous work (with Bernard Carles) alongside those of *Parlementaires* Robert Garnier, Guy du Faur de Pibrac and Jacques Faye.[255] Equally, the *Jeux Floraux* encouraged a number of poets and writers from across the country to seek the awards of golden violets, marigolds and eglantines, and the renown which accompanied them.[256] Having had a father who was heavily involved in the *Jeux Floraux*, it seems very likely that Coignard was immersed in this literary culture and came into contact with the poets who took part in this annual competition.[257] Among these, Pierre de Ronsard caught

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[250] Françoise Delame-Watts, *Art, rhétorique et idéologie dans la poésie des Jeux Floraux de Toulouse au seizième siècle (1513-1583)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ohio State University, 1981), p. 3.
[251] *Pastel* is a plant which contains a blue dye that is extracted from its leaves. Gilles Caster, 'La technique commerciale du pastel à Toulouse au XVI^{e} siècle', *Annales du Midi*, 2.1 (1989), 449-71; Henri Ramet, *Histoire de Toulouse*, (Toulouse: Tarride, 1935), p. 347. See also Robert A. Schneider, 'Crown and capitoulat: municipal government in Toulouse 1500-1789', in *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*, ed. by Philip Benedict (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 195-220.
[252] Philippe Wolff, *Histoire de Toulouse* (Toulouse: Privat, 1967), p. 352.
[253] Delame-Watts, *Art*, p. 68.
[254] Ibid., p. 77.
[255] Pierre Escudé, *Imprimerie et Pouvoir: Politique, livre et langue à Toulouse de 1475 à 1617* (Geneva: Droz, 2017), p. 136.
[256] Delame-Watts, *Art*, p. 3.
[257] Colette H. Winn, 'Variations on the Same Tune: The Love Lyrics of Louise Labé and Gabrielle de Coignard', in *Teaching French Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by Colette H. Winn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2011), pp. 285-302 (p. 287).

Coignard's attention; he was commemorated in her sonnet, *Sur la mort de Ronsard*, as the great 'Apollon'.[258] She presented the highly respected *Vendômois* as a guide and chaperone in the literary sphere, and her strong alignment with him, in her sonnets 80 and 81, helped her to justify her desire to write poetry within the poetry itself. Coignard's response to modesty is written within the context of the *Jeux Floraux*, and it is bound up in a deeply personal spiritual quest with God, which draws clear inspiration from Ronsard's own divine journey, as she composed her own works in the intimacy of her isolated *cabinet*.[259]

The timing of *Œuvres chrestiennes* is crucial because of the context of the Wars of Religion within which Coignard's poetry had been composed. During her time of writing and beyond her death, this context enables her to position herself alongside the common and well-accepted rhetoric that is prevalent in her home city of Toulouse. The troubling period of religious conflict in France had a significant influence on Coignard's life. Toulouse was an ultra-Catholic stronghold, so extreme in its position that it rivalled strong anti-Protestant sentiment in Paris.[260] Bloodshed and violence were fiercely present in 1562 when local Protestants tried to seize the city; three days of brutal street fighting ensued and around three to four thousand citizens were killed. Local Catholics hunted down Protestants and were aided by the highly influential *Parlement*.[261] The *Parlement de Toulouse* openly revealed its Catholic zeal; its 'stern and unswerving opposition to the Reformed religion'[262] entailed the inquisition of heretics and the introduction of various religious orders in Toulouse from the mid-1560s onwards, including Jesuits, Franciscan Cordeliers, and Carthusians.[263] The

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[258] Gabrielle de Coignard, '129. Sur la mort de Ronsard', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 5, p. 158.
[259] Colette H. Winn, 'Gabrielle de Coignard, 'Sur la mort de Ronsard' (1594)', in *Ronsard, figure de la variété*, ed. by Colette H. Winn, Études ronsardiennes, 10 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1985-2004), VIII (2002), pp. 251-65 (p. 253).
[260] Philip Benedict, 'The St Bartholomew's Massacres', 221; Joan Davies, 'Persecution and Protestantism: Toulouse, 1562-1575', *The Historical Journal*, 22.1 (1979), 31-51 (p. 32).
[261] Gayle K. Brunelle, 'Kinship, Identity, and Religion in Sixteenth-Century Toulouse: The Case of Simon Lecomte', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 32.3 (2001), 669-95 (p. 678).
[262] Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr., 'The Legal Response to Heresy in Languedoc, 1500-1560, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 4.1 (1973), 19-30 (p. 19).
[263] Carole Delprat, 'Les magistrats du parlement de Toulouse durant la Ligue', *Annales du Midi: revue*

Collège des Jésuites, in particular, was established in 1562, and it exercised a lot of power in its aims of confronting heresy through the transmission and teaching of knowledge.[264] The *Parlement*'s firm links with clerical institutions in the city and in the provinces meant that it could sway the city's allegiances.[265] Equally, it strengthened the operation of various Catholic leagues defined by the Council of Trent.[266] Members of the municipal government were involved in facilitating murders and mobilizing communal resources for the city to rebel against the crown's wishes for peace.[267] Furthermore, as a demonstration of Toulouse's quest to defend the 'spiritual integrity of the [Catholic…] community', in the 1590s the city joined the Catholic Holy League.[268] Toulouse clearly saw itself as a 'bastion of Catholic orthodoxy in a sea of rural heresy'.[269]

The ongoing war on Protestantism was not simply on the battlefield; it was also a war of words. In 1593 the Jesuits created their own local printing press to spread the true word of God through the works of Ignatius of Loyola and his supporters.[270] As we know from Madeleine des Roches's own verses on religious conflict in Poitiers, it was not uncommon for women to contribute to religious propaganda. As a medium through which ideas were diffused, the printing press encouraged women to contribute their opinions in print. During a time which some women could express their views, Coignard's fervently Catholic poetry is weaponized in the Counter-Reformation movement and her daughters present it as a useful catechism to be read by the women of Toulouse. In her religious poetry Coignard herself references the wars in sonnets 27 and 28; strikingly, two different tones are

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archéologique, historique et philologique de la France méridionale, 108.213 (1996), 39-62 (p. 44).
[264] Escudé, *Imprimerie*, p. 43.
[265] See Mark Greengrass, 'The Anatomy of a Religious Riot in Toulouse in May 1562', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34.3 (1983), 367-91.
[266] Delprat, 'Les magistrats', 45.
[267] For an understanding of the *Parlement*'s role and *capitouls*' role in religious conflict in Toulouse, see Schneider, 'Crown', pp. 195-220 (pp. 202-03). *Capitouls* were the municipal magistrates in Toulouse.
[268] Robert A. Schneider, *Public Life in Toulouse, 1463-1789: From Municipal Republic to Cosmopolitan City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 359.
[269] Brunelle, 'Kinship', p. 678.
[270] Escudé, *Imprimerie*, p. 106.

employed to highlight God's wrath about what Protestants have done to France. Sonnet 27 is a personal response to the conflict:

> Je n'attends des mortels ceste paix desirée,
> Car si le Tout Puissant n'y met sa saincte main,
> Elle se changera du jour au lendemain,
> Et son plaisir sera de bien courte durée.
>
> Mais si le long travail de la guerre endurée,
> Nous est ores changé en un repos certain,
> Sans qu'on offence en rien l'honneur du Souverain,
> Ceste divine paix sera toute asseurée.
>
> Mais pour gouster le fruict de la tranquilité,
> Je voudrois que mon cœur ne fut point agité,
> Reposant ses desirs sous la haute puissance.
>
> Je voudrois que mon corps fut subject à l'esprit,
> Embrassant ardemment la Croix de Jesus Christ,
> Pour enfermer la paix dedans ma conscience.[271]

Coignard voices here the desperate hope that an impending peace will not be short-lived. In turning to God, she compares her inner turmoil to the turmoil that takes place outside her *cabinet*. The comparison works to effect an analogy between the individual speaker's internal conflict within the conscience and a more universal and physical conflict that is exterior to Coignard's thoughts. Sonnet 28, by contrast, directly invokes the 'heretic war' that has triggered God's wrath. In a Ronsardian fashion, we find an intriguing ventriloquizing of God's own views. He declares that He will punish the cities for their iniquities:[272]

> Les efforts inhumains de la guerre heretique,
> Renversoient l'univers d'un estrange pouvoir,
> Et sans baigner les yeux, l'on ne pouvoit plus voir
> Les persecutions de la foy catholique.
>
> Dieu regardant nostre courage inique,
> Qui pour tous ces malheurs ne pouvoit s'esmouvoir,
> Nous dit en son courroux: je vous feray sçavoir

[271] Gabrielle de Coignard, '27', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-14, p. 64.
[272] A similar tone animates Coignard's adaptation of the story of Judith, where the Biblical city of Bethulia represents her own city of Toulouse, a site of bloody conflict. See Kathleen M. Llewellyn, *Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), p. 26. I return to this below.

Comme je sçay punir la lascheté publique.

Vous craignez d'hazarder vostre vie pour moy,
Laissant si prez de vous perdre ma saincte loy,
Vous ne mourrez donc point en me faisant service,

Mais je vous frapperay dans vos fortes citez,
Car le nombre infini de vos iniquitez,
Offence ma pitié, provoque ma justice.[273]

These contrasting responses to Coignard's local environment offer different ways to also reformulate perceptions of the female body against the backdrop of modesty. As she looks out to the world outside her home as a witness, both the public declamatory voice and the more private act of writing form part of Coignard's poetic and confessional identity.

Coignard's fervently Catholic stance, influenced by her war-torn environment, transforms her *cabinet* into a medium through which she may give voice to a devotional identity and strengthen her own relationship with God. She brings the public conflict of the religious wars into her private lodgings both to explore a poetic stance on the issues, and to create a space of refuge from the external struggle. The *cabinet toulousain* is therefore both a separate space and part of Coignard's response to her local surroundings. Just as Toulouse figures itself as a Counter-Reformation city, Coignard both aligns herself with the same movement, and forges her own, specific and poetic devotional identity. Often, as her sonnets effectively map the space of her private lodgings, her real-life *cabinet* transforms itself into a fictive one in her solitary world of meditation. As women were for the most part prohibited from taking part in religious rituals or confraternities, Coignard explores the 'sacred home' as an alternative space for private devotion.[274] The literary *cabinet* thus becomes a sanctuary, an opportunity to explore both her Catholic identity, and to present two distinctly personal

[273] Gabrielle de Coignard, '28. Sur la coqueluche', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-14, pp. 64, 66.
[274] Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 83.

interpretations of modesty in what amounts to an 'intensely intimate autobiographical journal'.[275]

In the early modern period, the *cabinet* represented a setting in which women could withdraw from everyday life, engage in private devotion and note down their private thoughts and feelings.[276] It counteracted suspicion by providing an opportunity for private speech that did not necessarily break a woman's vow of silence, at least not in public.[277] The *cabinet* held women writers' 'secrets' or treasures, which, when transformed into printed texts, became exposed. For example, *The Queens Closet Opened* (1655) allegedly exposed the secret recipes of Queen Henrietta Maria and the *Ladies Cabinet Opened* (1639) disclosed food and drink recipes.[278] This idea of secrecy reveals an interesting connection between the *cabinet* and (im)modesty. In the early modern period, the term 'secret' not only referred to non-explicable material processes, but also female genitals. The enclosed space of the *cabinet*, therefore, had the potential to eroticize a hidden knowledge about the female body.[279] The woman writer's private area becomes sexually and socially charged; it conceals the forbidden female voice and desire. We find this in Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania* (1621) in which the female protagonist, Pamphilia, writes in her *cabinet* to prevent the circulation of her private writings. When she offers her poetry to her beloved, Amphilanthus, she blushes at the thought of presenting herself in front of his eyes, as if she were revealing her own body to his gaze.[280] In order for the woman writer to maintain her modesty, the *cabinet*'s contents must be concealed. As is the case for all women

[275] Baker, '"Sonnets spirituels"', 45.
[276] Brundin et al., *Sacred Home*, p. 83.
[277] Bernadette Andrea, 'Pamphilia's Cabinet: Gendered Authorship and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth's "Urania"', *ELH*, 68.2 (2001), 335-58 (p. 335).
[278] Mary E. Fissell, 'Women in healing spaces', in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Laura L. Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)), pp. 153-64 (p. 157).
[279] Ibid., p. 157.
[280] Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (New York: Longman, 2001), p. 244.

writers, the *cabinet* can only be expressed in negative terms; it holds what cannot be revealed.

As we find in Wroth's story, the *cabinet* is a 'location of female subjectivity' which requires her character to conceal or 'repress her indecorous agency as a speaking subject first birthing and then burying her poetry.'[281] It therefore symbolizes the boundaries between public and private, modesty and immodesty, veiled and unveiled, and at times their violation.[282] For Coignard, however, there is no strict boundary between the two spheres. The transition from manuscript to print, facilitated by her daughters, does more than entail a penetration of intimate space whereby her audience is able to unlock her personal *cabinet* in her writing: it realigns the co-ordinates of her (im)modest understanding of her spiritual and embodied self. She remains in this space when she experiences and connects with God. Her *cabinet* is *à l'écart*; it resides not only between public and private conflict, but also in between the material world and the spiritual world.

This aspect of confession is what aligns her writing most markedly with the Counter-Reformation, a movement through which Catholic leaders sought to win back souls to the true Catholic faith after the success of the Protestant challenge. As many scholars have shown, the Catholic church began to reinvent itself in the later years of the sixteenth century by encouraging its followers to practise a more individualized form of meditation. The individual was encouraged to seek a more aesthetic and passionate religion which was concerned with the senses.[283] Central to this movement was the work of the leading Jesuit, St Ignatius Loyola, whose *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) had one of the most profound

[281] Andrea, 'Pamphilia's Cabinet', p. 348.
[282] Clarke, *Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing*, p. 252.
[283] For two very differently accented approaches to the Counter-Reformation, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Julia Kristeva, *Teresa, My Love*, trans. by Lorna Scott Fox (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). See also John Bossy, 'The Counter reformation and the People of Catholic Europe', *Past and Present*, 47.1 (1970), 51-70; Nicolas S. Davidson, *The Counter-Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: a new view of the Counter Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977).

influences on the Western Church during this time. He encouraged followers to regularly practise private devotional exercises; this would lead to an examination of the conscience and a 'fruitful pious meditation'.[284] Catholic reform developed new techniques of 'meditative prayer and Eucharistic devotions'; Jesuits increasingly sought to use these techniques as a way to self-reflect as 'sinners' and contemplate Christ's passion.[285]

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics and historians have generally agreed that Coignard was 'one of the most important feminine personalities of her century'.[286] Her 'vrai talent poétique' and 'strophes délicieuses', some argued, made her a figure who was ahead of her time.[287] The first scholar to draw serious attention to her was Terence Cave in his ground-breaking research on Spanish mysticism and Renaissance devotional poetry; soon after, there followed Huguette Kaiser's doctoral thesis which focused on Coignard's devotional themes and Colette Winn's study of the influence of Petrarchan imagery on her spiritual sonnets.[288] In recent years, Winn has published an important critical edition of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* (1995), followed by Melanie E. Gregg's own bilingual version (2004). Research has focused on Coignard's encounter with the body and eroticism, parallels that can be drawn between her, Petrarch, Labé, and Ronsard, as well as her depiction of female exemplars, specifically the biblical Judith. Building on this scholarship, my own engagement with Coignard's work concentrates on her responses to modesty by way of the female body, which are shaped by events in Toulouse and her Catholic faith.

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[284] Henry O. Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 37.
[285] Ibid., p. 40.
[286] Jeanne Moulin, *La Poésie féminine de Marie de France à Marie Noël* (Paris: Seghers, 1966), p. 155.
[287] Étienne Léon de La Mothe-Langon, *Biographie toulousaine, ou, Dictionnaire historique de personages qui par des vertus, des talens, des écrits, de grandes actions, des fondations utiles, des opinions singulières, des erreurs, etc. se sond rendus célèbres dans la ville de Toulouse, ou qui ont contribué à son illustration / par une société des gens de lettres*, 2 vols (Paris: L.G. Michaud, 1823), I, p. 133; Prosper Blanchemain, 'Gabrielle de Coignard, femme-poète du XVI^{e} siècle', *Archives du Bibliophile*, 3 (1860), 199-203 (p. 200).
[288] See Cave, *Devotional Poetry*; Huguette R. Kaiser, *Gabrielle de Coignard: Poétesse dévote* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Emory University, 1975); Winn, 'Introduction', pp. 13-126.

I firstly explore Coignard's response to modesty through two different lenses: the erotic and the religious. Working within a religious realm, Coignard's poetry complicates her relationship with her body. While she praises the traditionally feminine virtues of chastity and purity, we can equally trace moments of deep eroticism in her works. Her sonnets 15 and 36 reveal a quest for a union with the Holy Spirit as a way of exploring her own devotional identity. This is expressed through Petrarchan imagery; the language strikingly resembles not only Petrarch's poetic language but also Labé's descriptions of an unnamed lover. It has been clear for some time that Coignard was profoundly inspired by Petrarch and Labé, as well as Ronsard. Equally, her poetry is shaped by the works of Jesuits and Spanish mystics who create a 'highly individualized emotive spirituality', encouraging Christians to develop a more personal and passionate relationship with God.[289] Both the Petrarchan poets and the religious writers of the Counter-Reformation act, then, as exemplars for Coignard to draw on for her own interests. Using an amorous discourse, Coignard transforms the female body into an honourable site through which she may access a high, spiritual realm, calling into question the justification of female desire in a strictly religious context.

This same emphasis on Christianity reveals a second response to modesty which specifically addresses the social assumption that women's bodies are inherently shameful. In sonnets 80 and 81, her dying body encapsulates the agonies of illness, impending death and the body as a means through which divine inspiration can be sought. In these poems, Coignard also references her widowhood and uses her illness to deflect attention away from this alarming position. Like the Dames des Roches, she counters the erotic body with moments that de-eroticize this very same body. Writing becomes a way of soothing her physical symptoms and the loss of her husband as a widow who is constrained by pain and

[289] Baker, '"Sonnets spirituels"', 47.

grief. Her poetry unveils a deep contemplation of a woman's blissful reunion with God who is presented as her second husband, partly as a way to avoid remarrying. She attempts to promote a feminine spirituality during the Counter-Reformation and she contributes to what Gary Ferguson calls the 'feminisation of devotion', a new religious discourse which offered devout women agency in the late sixteenth century. [290] Her two understandings of the female body place her in between Marguerite's combination of religious and erotic discourses and Madeleine's commentary on widowhood. The intimate surroundings of Coignard's *cabinet* provoke a particular focus on an intimate portrayal of her body, as simultaneously a sexual and a spiritual vessel, which creates a new feminized spirituality, broadening the scope for a devout woman to express desire in a religious context.

While her religious status affords Coignard a more acceptable (posthumous) position in print, we still find collaborative modesty working behind the scenes of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* to facilitate her entry in the public sphere. After her death, her daughters, Jeanne and Catherine, compile poems into a collection and have them printed with the help of printers, Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles, as well as an unnamed editor; these male influences will be discussed in Chapter 4. Coignard's daughters accompany the poems into print with a dedication to further devout ladies, Marguerite de Valois, Clémence Isaure and biblical Dorcas, to position their mother alongside exemplary and modest women of the time, as a woman linked to the city of Toulouse. They complement Coignard's own version of the *Book of Judith* which reiterates her status as a chaste and heroic widow, firmly grounded on *toulousain* soil. This takes further the correlation between poetry and place (and specifically city spaces) which I have been working with in this thesis. Against the backdrop of religious conflict and the Counter-Reformation, Coignard's *cabinet* in her

[290] Gary Ferguson, *The Feminisation of Devotion: Gabrielle De Coignard, Anne De Marquets, and François De Sales. Women's Writing in the French Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 187.

toulousain home is a medium through which she subtly responds to local affairs. Her daughters ensure that even after her death, she is remembered as a Christian poet in Catholic Toulouse, a *resource* who shapes a highly intimate strand of female devotion which future women will embrace in the following century.

I.i. Gabrielle de Coignard's Literary Responses to Modesty

Even in the intimacy of her *cabinet*, Coignard is very aware of what was expected of her as an early modern woman. At numerous points in her *Œuvres chrestiennes* she calls attention to the traditional virtues of chastity and silence that restricted women's sexuality. For instance, in sonnet 19 she encourages fellow Christians to chase away the 'cruel serpent'[291] of a worldly love to seek a more celestial love that inspires virtue:

> [Celui] qui est chaste et parfaict, modeste, et gracieux
> Dardant ses trais dorez de la voute des cieux
> Non pour nous massacrer, mais pour nous faire vivre.[292]

This celestial love is one that is founded on chastity and grace. In sonnet 23, Coignard builds on this idea and brings to light the importance of '[q]uitt[er] joyeusement du monde les plaisirs'.[293] Christians' happiness and entry into heaven can be achieved if they pursue '[d]ouce virginité, nourrice d'innocence […] marque de continence'.[294] This alliance with chastity is placed within a specific gendered context, as shown by Coignard's reference to female exemplars. It is a common tool which she uses throughout her poetry to praise women whom she admires and who mirror her own qualities. She aligns herself with the model *femme de bien* to whom all women were expected to aspire. As a fervent Catholic it is not surprising that she leaves space to commemorate the most obvious example of Christian modesty: the Virgin Mary. Her *Pour L'Assumption de nostre Dame* praises the mother of

[291] Gabrielle de Coignard, '19', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 3, p. 56.
[292] Ibid., ll. 12-14, p. 56.
[293] Gabrielle de Coignard, '23', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 10, p. 60.
[294] Ibid., ll. 1-4, p. 60.

Christ who reflects her own modest qualities: 'Pure, saincte, mere, pucelle'.[295] While Coignard is not herself a virgin, she does uphold the same qualities of purity and chastity, she suggests. Likewise, Saint Radegonde, founder of the Abbey of the Holy Cross in Poitiers, is lauded for her honourable 'cœur si plain de toute chasteté'; subsequently, Coignard too presents herself as honourable.[296] Her use of female religious figures not only places her within the realm of modesty; it also reinforces her piety in the eyes of the public. As we have discovered in the stories of early modern women, a woman's silence was affixed to modesty. In her works Coignard is quick to mention early on her refusal to have her works published.

This makes it clear that Coignard's seclusion in the domestic sphere is deliberate; it is a choice to retreat from the 'hostile [male] gaze' and to have her works represent a very personal connection between her and God.[297] This withdrawal from society is a common trope in writing of the early modern period, perhaps most familiar to contemporary readers in Montaigne's decision to isolate himself in his library in order to properly think and write. As scholars have noted, Coignard becomes in effect a nun, leading a conventual life of meditation. Indeed, as the collection opens with the claim that Coignard hid her poetry from her daughters and refused to publish her works during her lifetime, it is only after her death that her poems will be read by others:

> [L]a postérité
> Lira des vers de moy[298]

This acknowledgement of being read one day could mean that she envisaged a place in print, or it could allude to the circulation of her manuscript within a restricted circle. In either case, her allusion to posterity suggests a willingness for an imagined audience of some kind. Her

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[295] Gabrielle de Coignard, 'Pour l'Assumption de nostre Dame', in *Œuvres chrétiennes*, l. 59, p. 140.
[296] Gabrielle de Coignard, '106', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 3, p. 136.
[297] Paula Sommers, 'Gendered Distaffs: Gabrielle de Coignard's Revision of Classical Tradition', *Classical and Modern Literature*, 18.13 (1998), 203-10 (p. 209).
[298] Gabrielle de Coignard, '90', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 12-13, p. 122.

own private exploration of her devotional identity, then, expands beyond the *cabinet* to an imagined, perhaps, female readership, who may inherit something from her religious and lyrical subjectivity. The element of time is important here. We find an emerging *décalage* of the corpus, from composition to print. Coignard presents herself as not being concerned with fame – at least not during her own lifetime. She is conscious, it seems, that while she cannot circulate her works now, later, perhaps even after her death she will have the opportunity to be read by others. This future is a time in which she will be recognized retrospectively as a poet and a modest woman. As we find in this chapter, this image will be partly fostered by her daughters. If this holds true, then her refusal to have her works circulated proves to be another, deployment of a humility *topos*.

The opposition between Coignard's present state of writing and future circulation, in manuscript form or as a publication, prove, as we shall see in what follows, to be fundamental to her specific understanding of modesty's constraints. For while she maintains her allegiance to modesty, we also trace moments in which she challenges it, together with its complex conventions, to obtain agency, both for herself as poem, and for her future readers.

ii. Eroticizing Devotion: Sonnets 15 and 36

Coignard's response to modesty is, as noted above, located within a strictly religious framework. Manifesting itself firstly through a specific erotic discourse, it finds justification for the sexualized female body through its relationship with God. In sonnets 15 and 36, for instance, Coignard combines religion and eroticism to offer her female body the opportunity to break away from the chains of shame and embarrassment and to explore her own intimate connection with a feminine devotion, which her imagined future readers may also achieve. Reworking Petrarchan imagery in a specifically religious context, she deploys images of fire and flames, boiling, blood, and desire, to redirect her reader's understanding of what it

means to write poetry of this kind. Already in sonnet 1 she assertively states, 'Je ne veux point porter le glorieux laurier', opening up a distance from fellow secular poets, such as those who might have competed in the *Jeux Floraux*.[299] Yet even this claim reveals that she is inspired by secular tropes and poets, such as Joachim du Bellay who came before her: her opening sonnet shares striking parallels with the first sonnet of *Les Regrets* (1558), in which du Bellay states:

> Je ne veux point fouiller au sein de la nature,
> Je ne veux point chercher l'esprit de l'univers,
> Je ne veux point sonder les abîmes couvers,
> Ni dessiner du ciel la belle architecture.[300]

In the same style, Coignard says:

> Je n'ay jamais gousté de l'eau de la fontaine,
> Que le cheval aeslé fit sortir du rocher.
> A ses payennes eaux je ne veux point toucher,
> Je cerche autre liqueur pour soulager ma peine.
>
> […]
>
> Je ne veux point porter le glorieux laurier,
> La couronne de myrte ou celle d'oliver,
> Honneurs que l'on reserve aux testes plus insines.[301]

Coignard's affirmation is a periphrasis; she does exactly what she says that she does not, employing du Bellay's poetic structure to set out her own ideas. As we find in a number of Coignard's sonnets, she employs the early modern vogue for *imitatio* in which authors imitated another author's 'syntactic and rhetorical structures'.[302] In du Bellay's sonnet, the poet establishes what his poetry is and is not. He uses '[s]es vers' as a medium through which he writes down whatever crosses his mind, moans whenever he feels regret, laughs with them, and tells them any secrets as if they were his closest confidants:

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[299] Gabrielle de Coignard, '1', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 9, p. 40.
[300] Joachim du Bellay, 'I', in *The Regrets: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. by David R. Slavitt (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004), ll. 1-4, p. 16.
[301] Coignard, '1', ll. 1-4, 9-11, p. 40.
[302] Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 12.

> Je me plains à mes vers, si j'ai quelque regret:
> Je me ris avec eux, je leur dis mon secret,
> Comme étant de mon cœur les plus sûrs secrétaires.[303]

The term 'secrétaires' reveals his poetry to be a collection of his personal thoughts and secrets; as is the case for Coignard, writing poetry becomes partly an act of confession. Moreover, as the secretary to the ambassador in Rome in the 1550s, it refers to du Bellay's post as well as a space away from this more formal role. He implies that he has a *secrétaire*, a writing desk of his own away from society, and that his *Regrets* are a poetic version of that space: an intimate space to profess his secrets. Using the same model of 'Je ne veux point' Coignard unveils sonnet 1 as an outline of her poetry; it is a means of expressing and exploring her relationship with God. Treating du Bellay as her model, she uses this concept to refer to her own *cabinet*. As we see in many moments in the *Œuvres chrestiennes*, Coignard marks out what her predecessors or contemporaries do, and takes inspiration from them to define her own style. Thus her poetry is not only a confessional autobiography; it is also a *commentaire*, an engagement with selected interlocutors.

Coignard's use of the 'Je ne veux point' construction is also intriguing in light of modesty. The negation is a refusal to take public control of her poetry; it suggests that she wishes to remain silent and chaste. This modesty trope may be compared with Pender's study of similar strategies of performed modesty in early modern English women's writing.[304] She notes that puritan poet Anne Bradstreet uses a similar ploy to detach herself from the terms, 'poet' or 'historian' in her printed text, *The Tenth Muse*.[305] Similarly to Coignard's poetry, Bradstreet's text was printed on her behalf by a family member, her brother-in-law, John Woodbridge. She was understood to have been against publication, which Woodbridge himself mentions in the preface to the work.[306] In Bradstreet's own

[303] Bellay, 'I', ll. 9-11, p. 16.
[304] Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing,* p. 15.
[305] See Pender's study of Anne Bradstreet in Ibid., pp. 149-52.
[306] Ibid., p. 150.

'Prologue' she appeals for an audience for her poetry while renouncing her position as a poet. Coignard seeks to do the same thing in sonnet 1; she sets herself up as poet whilst publicly distancing herself from this very title. The negation of 'Je ne veux point' implies that though Coignard knows her voice will be made public one day, she is not interested in fame. Though this poetic trope veils more public ambitions.

Claiming to distance herself from du Bellay and his peers, does not stop her from using the *Pléiade* poets as exemplars for her own interests. When discussing her intimate relationship with God, she mixes Petrarchism and religion by adapting the symbolic meaning behind flames and fire. We find this in sonnet 15 which calls on God to burn her desires and pierce her flesh:

> Perce moy l'estomach d'une amoureuse fleche,
> Brusle tous mes desirs d'un feu estincellant,
> Esleve mon esprit d'un desir excellent,
> Foudroye de ton bras l'obstacle qui l'empesche.[307]

Coignard places herself in an authoritative position; her imperatives incite God to please her with flames. He replaces the desire of worldly pleasures for the desire for him. She speaks to God like a lover who has inspired a Petrarchan poet. Her address of 'tu' suggests a level of intimacy. This inspiration has an explicit bodily reaction: her flesh burns with the divine flame. If she were to have addressed this to a secular lover, we might be inclined to compare her more explicitly with Labé. She is overwhelmed with love and ecstasy and just like Labé's poetic persona, she begs her lover to influence her body. In Labé's sonnet 8, the persona desires to be kissed: 'baise m'encor'.[308] Along similar lines, Coignard actively calls on God, her lover, to burn her. This mixture of violence and delight is what allows her to feel God's presence working within her. Here the corporeal and the intellectual are connected, the

[307] Coignard, '15', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 52.
[308] Labé, 'XVIII', in *Œuvres complètes*, l. 1, p. 131.

physical and the spiritual are intertwined.[309] Modesty then becomes requalified as something that can be challenged, in pursuit of a practice of specifically female spirituality.

This idea is developed in sonnet 36 which evokes the image of a flame in a slightly different context. Building on the Petrarchan trope of fire, Coignard introduces another Petrarchan model: the image of a moth attracted to the flame.[310] The moth's position represents how she burns for God's love:

> Le papillon, qui s'eslance en la flamme
> Sans se vouloir esloigner de ses feux,
> Me doit servir d'un patron vertueux,
> Pour rechauffer la glace de mon ame.[311]

In this depiction, the 'papillon' represents an innocent and delicate creature, a pure character full of joy and dynamism. As we find later on, she aligns herself with this wandering character and affirms it to be her 'patron vertueux'. Just like the moth, she is attracted to the 'flamme divine' which appears to be dangerous.[312] The light, God, illuminates the space and the moth, her soul, is overcome by the irresistible desire to move towards it. Coignard's moth mimics a Petrarchan poet's quest to constantly gravitate towards his lover, which is both fatal and intensely sweet. Like her moth, Coignard cannot help but be drawn into the flames. In the intimacy of her poetic *cabinet*, the pull towards God is too strong to defy. It is an image of extreme sensual and emotional torture which reflects Petrarchan tropes of terrestrial passions.[313] This image becomes more profound when she affirms that the flame can 'rechauffer la glace de [s]on ame'.[314] Using the opposing elements of fire and ice, we see that the flame is worth embracing. By fusing a mystical and erotic language together,

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[309] Llewellyn, *The Widow*, p. 304.
[310] André Gendre, 'Quête de Dieu et séduction du monde dans les *Sonnets spirituels* de Gabrielle de Coignard', in *Cité des hommes, cité de Dieu: Travaux sur la littérature de la Renaissance en l'honneur de Daniel Ménager*, ed. by Jean Cèard, Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud, Michel Magnien and François Rouget (Geneva: Droz, 2003), pp. 419-30 (p. 422).
[311] Coignard, '36', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 72.
[312] Ibid., l. 11, p. 72. I translate 'papillon' as a moth, since it is commonly known that moths are attracted to flames, as opposed to butterflies.
[313] Melanie E. Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, pp. 1-21 (p. 14).
[314] Coignard, '36', l. 4, p. 72.

Coignard creates a feeling of extreme delight which challenges the negative connotations of modesty.[315] By applying long established secular descriptions of worldly love to her faith in God, she examines what is possible for a woman to say in a religious context and opens up a space of agency for herself, and for others.

In a strictly secular context, Coignard's erotic language is not a source of shame; it is a sign of sweet ecstasy. She upholds an atmosphere of intimacy, just like two lovers in an enclosed bedroom that is located away from the public sphere. Within this private space, eroticism is justified in the context of her relationship with God. Her piety is strengthened by her intense feelings for him. The constraining effects of modesty are thus weakened; Coignard finds a way for female desire to be expressed without public condemnation.

As we know from Marguerite's *Chansons* (1547-8), Coignard is not the first female author to talk about God in erotic terms. Indeed, religious themes reflected a woman's piety, a respected feminine virtue of the time, and it could hide more precarious erotic discourses. The link between printing and female promiscuity acquires less importance for Coignard who appears in print posthumously. What makes Coignard's writing striking is her intense closeness with God. The setting of a fictional *cabinet* intensifies this, creating a space where spiritual lovers reside. In this context, modesty's power is reconfigured. She shows that in a more spiritual realm, a woman can explore her desires and not lose her honour because of it.

Evoking gratitude towards God, in sonnet 36 she names him as the 'subject de [s]es amours'.[316] Like a lover who is infatuated with her beloved, she affirms that she would like him to trap her in his 'amoureuse trame' as the moth is trapped in the torturous flames.[317] Similarly, in sonnet 15, Coignard makes herself the subject of romantic discourse and not

[315] Madeleine Lazard, *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), p. 66.
[316] Coignard, '36', l. 9, p. 72
[317] Ibid., l. 8, p. 72.

the object of desire. Instead of being traditionally placed in the role of silent female beloved, like Labé, she thwarts expectations of Petrarchan poetry and gives herself the authority to talk about love. Similarly in Coignard's sonnet 15, a metaphor of releasing and ensnaring is employed. To lift up her spirit, she beseeches God: 'Foudroye de ton bras l'obstacle qui l'empesche'.[318] In a euphoric sense, he lifts up her emotions and awakes her from her slumber. He offers her an intimate relationship which takes her away from the horrors and pains of her life. Later in the poem she calls on God to ensnare her in his own trap: 'Qu'en tes rets amoureux mon ame tu enlasse'.[319] Like a folkloric hero, he rescues his damsel in distress and then entangles her in his own love. Imploring him to do so, she constructs a performance in which she is placed in a submissive and passive position. Since it is she who demands that these acts take place ('Je te veux supplier'), we know that this is another modesty trope.[320] Equally, her continual reassertion of the subject pronoun 'je' makes this clear. While sonnet 36 elevates God's position through the formal address of 'vous', in sonnet 15 Coignard creates an even more intimate relationship between her and God with 'tu'. This is demonstrated through exclamative-like expressions: 'tu n'es qu'amour, ô douce charité'.[321] Speaking to God personally, the 'ô' signals the fact that she is in awe of His greatness. This onomatopoeic sound could almost be interpreted as an orgasm. It acts as an interjection, and paired with apostrophes, the poetic voice becomes a Petrarchan lover who is overwhelmed with desire.[322]

Such a brazen response to God's presence is not an isolated account in the *Œuvres chrestiennes*. In sonnet 34, Coignard explicitly refers to Christ as a 'loyal espoux',[323] a

[318] Coignard, '15', l. 4, p. 52.
[319] Ibid., l. 14, p. 54.
[320] Ibid., l. 12, p. 54.
[321] Ibid., l. 9, p. 54.
[322] Winn, 'Variations', p. 301.
[323] Coignard, '34', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 3, p. 70.

second husband following the death of her husband, Pierre, and this is developed in sonnet 62 when she professes her infatuation for Christ, both as the holy father and her lover:

> Mon appuy, mon repos, mon amour, mon desir,
> Ma consolation, ma joye, mon plaisir,
> Mon pere, mon espoux, ma foy, mon esperance[.][324]

In these cases, Christ, and God, are not simply faithful companions, they are lovers who inspire joy and desire in her life. Appropriating an amorous rhetoric, she symbolizes most powerfully what Ferguson has named the 'feminisation of devotion', the 'transposition of a secular style into a religious context'.[325] Coignard's sweetness of style and highly emotional expression of her faith reflects the ambitions of religious writers of the Council of Trent, which played, as noted above, on an inward and pathetic mode of devotional writing to reignite Catholic zeal.[326] Coignard's construction of God as a lover is highly seductive and equally justifies her position as a widow, as we shall see. She widens modesty's scope and allows for a highly emotional and sensual depiction of a woman's relationship with the spiritual world, which creates a new feminine spirituality in which women and desire have a place.

This feminized spirituality becomes even more intriguing when Coignard explicitly introduces the flesh. In sonnet 15 Coignard calls on God to engage with her flesh using a violent act which is bittersweet to her senses: 'Perce moy l'estomach d'une amoureuse fleche'.[327] The notion of piercing is violent; the amorous arrow engages with the flesh and infects her body with God's love. She calls on him to behave like Cupid and to inspire a very sensual bodily reaction. At first, it seems clear that once more Coignard engages with Petrarch's poetry.[328] This paradoxical metaphor is used by Petrarch to contemplate his lover

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[324] Coignard, '62', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 96.
[325] Ferguson, *Feminisation*, p. 189.
[326] Cave, *Devotional Poetry*, p. 6.
[327] Coignard, '15', l. 1, p. 52.
[328] See Francesco Petrarca, 'CLXIV', in *Canzionere*, ll. 1-14, p. 189.

who both pierces and heals him: 'una man sola mi risana et punge'.[329] Petrarch recalls a sweet pain; he revels in the rapture of being in love with his beloved, Laura.[330] Coignard revels in ecstasy. This act of penetration recalls an intimate sexual act between two lovers. The arrow therefore becomes a phallic symbol which allows her to engage in consummation with God. Though she herself is an object in this act, she calls on God to act on her. This act gives her the agency to free herself from the chains of the male gaze. In her spiritual realm, her acts resemble the 'frank and passionate exposition of love' that Labé uses in her poetry to create an atmosphere of mysticism and *jouissance*.[331] In this state of rapture she sheds light on female desire, away from the associations that men have placed on her and other women's bodies. Sexuality and desire are sources of joy and union with God, not shame or embarrassment. Thus, Coignard contests modesty and explores how sexuality can be openly embraced in the spiritual realm.

This depiction of ecstasy of the flesh offers Coignard, agency partly because it complements the new emphasis on 'inwardness' which gained particular credibility during the Catholic Reformation. Spanish mysticism, inspired by writers such as Loyola and Luis de Granada as noted above, promoted a devotion which was more emotional, individualized, and mystical. What followed was a range of practices, namely penitence, prayer and meditation, which allowed the sinner to contemplate his or her suffering with Christ.[332] One particular writer and devout figure who embodies these practices is Teresa d'Ávila, Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun who was born in 1515 and died in 1582. In her autobiography, she explains the sensual visions and mystical experiences that she had suffered when engaging with God who appeared, at times, as a lover. The tender sentiments that she

[329] Ibid., l. 11, p. 189.
[330] Baker, '"Sonnets spirituels"', 54.
[331] Joanna Bankier, Dierdre Lashgari and Doris Earnshaw, *Women Poets of the World* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 166.
[332] Colette H. Winn, 'Introduction', p. 46.

expresses towards God position her alongside Coignard and she opens up a space for future women writers to reveal a religious and emotional ardour. Gian Lorenzo Bernini's statue, *The Ecstasy of St Teresa* (completed in 1652), powerfully, and famously, captures a female *jouissance* that stemmed from the saint's mystical experience with God. In this statue, the saint is pierced by an angel; this powerful, sensuous image highlights the irresistible 'torments of flesh and spirit' with which the Counter-Reformation sought to seduce its followers.[333] D'Ávila's erotic scene is intriguingly similar to Coignard's depiction of piercing flesh in her autobiography, completed in 1565 and published in English in 1611:

> I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans: and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God [...] During the days that this continued, I went about as if in a stupor. I had no wish to see or speak with anyone, but only to hug my pain, which caused me greater bliss than any that can come from the whole of creation.[334]

In Julia Kristeva's commentary on d'Ávila's mystical experiences and Bernini's artistic depiction of the golden spear scene, the senses of touch and sight are fused together to create an intense feeling of 'life burst[ing] into fullness […], suffering into bliss, mortification into delight, Nothingness into ecstasy[.]'[335] Specifically here, the pain of the golden spear penetrating flesh is transmuted into an 'ineffable jouissance' in which d'Ávila's body and soul fuse with the 'absent body'[336] of God, the Other, and she consumes the 'sacred liquid of the Trinity'.[337] D'Ávila's ecstatic mystical experience evokes the same feelings of pain and pleasure which Coignard incorporates into the image of piercing flesh. She positions

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[333] Kristeva, *Teresa*, p. 46.
[334] Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Jesus*, ed. and trans. by Edgar Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1960), p. 274.
[335] Kristeva, *Teresa*, p. 36.
[336] Ibid., p. 3.
[337] Ibid., p. 208.

herself in the sensual Counter-Reformation movement and in doing so places herself on the side of the Catholics in a war-torn Toulouse. Both Coignard's and d'Ávila's scenes take place in the intimacy of a woman's private lodgings, which only emphasizes the intimacy of their bodily experiences. Both writers use extreme hyperbolic, dramatization and appeals for pathos which mirror devotional literature of the time.[338] They shed light on the irresistible urge to be struck by the sweetness of God's touch, however painful it may be.

Kristeva raises the point that d'Ávila's union with God is not just about him but it is also about her. By encountering him she also encounters herself and she is then able to understand others. Her autobiography is transformed into an introspective work in which sensorial experiences are a medium through which she may pray and explore the self, *her* self. The complex relation of self-understanding to self-fashioning has been a dominant theme in critical discussion of the early modern period. As Nancy Selleck suggests, one's own identity is partly dependent on the relationship to others; the subject's construction of his or her own consciousness is influenced by others' 'competing perspectives, interests, awarenesses and attachments' which penetrate an interior space.[339] In a similar vein, Charles Taylor argues that identity is entrenched in a sense of orientation, that the question of 'Who Am I?' is partly linked with what one views as 'good' or 'valuable', as well as one's commitments, 'moral and spiritual orientation[s]' and intimate relations to loved ones.[340] These observations become especially significant in relation to devotional experience. D'Ávila's relationship with God is what defines her; through her mystical experiences she observes the 'ceaseless re-foundation of the self' and is shaped into both a pious woman and

[338] Cave, *Devotional Poetry*, p. 50.
[339] Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3; Christopher Tilmouth, 'Passion and Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Literature', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 12-32 (p. 17).
[340] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 27, 35-36.

a confessional writer.[341] Similarly, Coignard's sonnet 15, in which she calls on God to penetrate her body, is a reflection of Coignard's understanding of herself as God's servant in a time of religious turmoil in her home city. In sonnet 15 her call to him – '[e]sleve mon esprit' – is partly a call to enlightenment, both to understand God, the pleasurable pain of the body and what this bittersweet sensorial experience means for the poet's position in the celestial world.[342] Writing this experience down is an essential part in the foundation of this understanding; it solidifies her place with God and reconstitutes her place as a devout woman in Toulouse. We see this exploration of the self even more clearly when we later discover that her body unlocks a feminine spirituality.

Both writers can usefully be seen to exemplify what Hélène Cixous has called 'écriture féminine'. Her essay, *Le Rire de la Méduse* (2010), argues for a particular inscription of the female body and difference in language through experience. Veering away from the phallocentric system of discourse, she notes that women have been traditionally reduced to the role of sexual objects. To break away from this, she favours a cyclical mode of writing which concentrates on female sexuality, eroticization, and desires. Women should express their desires for themselves and forge a strong connection between writing and the body: 'L'écriture est pour toi, tu es pour toi, ton corps est à toi, prends-le.'[343] Writing therefore becomes a means of claiming authority, especially an authority over one's body against phallocentrism.[344] This theory finds embodied expression in Coignard's writing. The poet seeks autonomy over her body by describing its physicality. Within the poetic space of her *cabinet*, this new inscription of 'féminité' takes advantage of the *jouissance* of physical and spiritual pleasure which she actively seeks through God.[345] It is a way of restoring the

[341] Kristeva, *Teresa*, p. 79.
[342] Coignard, '15', l. 3, p. 52.
[343] Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', in *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), pp. 35-68 (p. 39).
[344] Ibid., p. 43.
[345] Ibid., p. 42.

self; through her writing, spiritual passion 'se vit et se dit' first of all with the body.[346] Coignard's calls to pain and pleasure highlight a non-verbal language about the female body which gives rise to a new discourse of desire that shatters modesty's influence.

Once Coignard has discussed the sensual female body, she transforms her body into a divine vessel of female spirituality by way of tears and water. In this way modesty becomes insignificant to her; what is more important is her specific feminine and Catholic approach to finding herself. Cixous's theory of experience with the body may be applied to Coignard use of non-verbal language in sonnet 15:

> Fay sourdre de mes yeux un fleuvre ruisselant
> Qu'au plus profond du cœur je porte recelant
> Des traits de ton amour la gracieuse breche.[347]

Having introduced the opposition of fire and ice a few lines before, Coignard now contrasts the divine flame of God with the natural element of water. She prays that God may extract all of the moisture from her flesh and to let it seep out into a river. This hyperbolic statement reflects the common images of *sanglots*, *criz*, *souspirs*, *gémissemens*, and *larmes* that can be found in sixteenth-century women's poetry.[348] These images give voice to her body; her river of tears mimics her stream of consciousness. It is a cyclical form of writing that once again calls to mind Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Using this imagery, Coignard's writing appears to resemble Labé's evocation of tears and water.[349] In sonnet 3, Labé speaks of the effect that her unnamed lover has on her:

> Ô longs desirs, ô esperances vaines,
> Tristes soupirs et larmes coutumieres
> A engendrer de moy maintes rivieres,
> Dont mes deus yeus sont sources et fontaines[350]

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[346] *Louise Labé: Les voix du lyrisme* (Paris: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 1990), p. 98.
[347] Coignard, '15', ll. 5-8, p. 52.
[348] Melanie E. Gregg, 'Women's Poetry of Grief and Mourning: The Language of lament in Sixteenth-Century French Lyric', *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 30.1 (2003), 55-73 (p. 56).
[349] Winn, 'Variations', p. 298.
[350] Louise Labé, 'III', in *Œuvres complètes*, ll. 1-4, p. 122.

In these passionate lines of verse, Labé's female persona is overwhelmed by the love and longing for her lover. Though she seeks to be free from the pains of love, she also gains some pleasure in weeping for her lover. The rivers and fountains of tears offer her solace. She incorporates the image of an arrow to signify love penetrating her body: 'Amour sur moy son arc essaie'.[351] Coignard does not simply mimic Labé; she adapts the signification of her tears to embody a strikingly feminized spirituality. She expresses her love and dedication to God through the act of crying. The tears that she cries are therefore an overflowing of joy; she is overwhelmed by the pleasure and pain of being pierced by an arrow and, like d'Ávila, finding the self. Judging by the following expressions of 'au plus profond du cœur' and '[d]es traits de ton amour', her tears are more profound than sensual effusions.[352] Her tears are an emotional and sexual release for her interior. Water is a means of washing away past torments and pleasures of the world. As Cave has found in devotional literature of the time, tears and water can also signify salvation and penance for the devout.[353] For Coignard, a devout Catholic, these tears sterilize her pain and grant her a special union with God. Her body is the source of these tears; as her tears seep out of her body, it generates a mystical outpouring. In Coignard's poems, then, readers will find a body that is acclaimed as a means through which a woman can be with God and understand herself.

Coignard's seemingly private explorations of her relationship with God widen the scope for women and their bodies to respond to modesty in a way that offers them agency within a specific religious context. Her confessional poetry reveals itself to be in the first instance a spiritual quest to access divine love and her own devotional identity. As we discover in her poetry, eroticism is vital for God's manifestation of love; it forms part of the

[351] Ibid., l. 9, p. 122.
[352] Coignard, '15', ll. 7-8, p. 52.
[353] Cave, *Devotional Poetry*, p. 48.

process of spiritual effusion. Her spiritual transformation is religious, and also social in so far as it is fuelled by the context of religious turmoil which resurfaces subtly in Coignard's *cabinet*. This intimate location is intertwined with Coignard's wish to access a higher power. As we find in Coignard's second response to modesty, it is a wish which is not only achieved through an erotic discourse: depictions of illness and widowhood form an alternative path which allows the body to transcend shame and gives Coignard a personal justification for refusing to remarry.

iii. Defending the Widow: Sonnets 80 and 81

Widowed just three years into her marriage to Pierre de Mansencal, Coignard appears to have been devastated by his early passing and implies that her poems are a way of finding consolation during her grief.[354] In her writing, she draws attention to the happy marriage that she shared with him and tells her family to never ask her to remarry:

> Ne me parlez jamais de me remarier,
> O vous, mes chers parens, si vous aymes ma vie,
> Ne m'en parlez jamais, car je n'ay plus envie
> A un second espoux oncques m'apparier,[355]

The strong alliance that Coignard forms with her husband may be seen in the way that she is presented to her public when her poems are eventually published. Her religious work is not simply penned by 'Gabrielle de Coignard' but rather by the widow of her husband. Her daughters make it known that Coignard is not only a good Catholic woman, she is also loyal to her husband. This marital connection bears witness to a more formal display of allocating an important status to a woman in print; as we find in Chapter 4, Coignard is sanctioned by her esteemed husband who facilitates her posthumous transition into a male space and connects her with her local surroundings.

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[354] Feugère, *Les femmes*, p. 35.
[355] Gabrielle de Coignard, '105', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 136.

In her poetry, Coignard presents herself as a mourning widow. More focus, however, is placed on the emotional burden that has been placed on her daughters:

> Le souvenir de veoir mes filles en enfance,
> Orphelines de pere et sans nulle defence,
> M'est un plus grand tourment que le mesme trespas.[356]

She creates a sympathetic portrayal of her family and deflects attention away from herself. In this story of widowhood, deflection plays an important part in protecting Coignard's modest image, especially as a widow and woman poet. As we know from Chapter 2, the early modern widow was a controversial figure who could possess much power and independence.[357] Similarly to Madeleine, Coignard calls attention to her suffering as an old and ill woman, soon approaching her death in sonnets 80 and 81. She emphasizes the pain that she undergoes on a daily basis to stress that she is not as autonomous as the position of a widow may theoretically symbolize.

Her failing health, like that of Madeleine, plays a prominent part in her combat against modesty; she displaces the connotations of shame and sexualization, often linked with the female body, to reveal a more empathetic model that places Coignard as a mere victim of time and illness and a woman who is by no means free to do as she pleases. We find this very clearly in sonnet 80 when she refers to the metaphor of piercing, previously found in sonnet 15, but now in a differently accented domestic mode. In this reworking of Psalms 23, she reveals her body to be constrained and penetrated by sharp objects. This unpleasant image is achieved by using a bed as a metaphor for a cage:

> Je trouve le lict dur, la nuict m'est une année
> Il semble que mes draps soient de chardons poignans,
> Que mon corps soit pressé dans des ces estraignans,
> Tant je suis de souci cruellement genée.[358]

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[356] Gabrielle de Coignard, '119', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 12-14, p. 150.
[357] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, p. 88.
[358] Gabrielle de Coignard, '80', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 112.

What should be a bed where Coignard seeks relaxation and security has become an object which shackles her body. She alters the common associations of one's private lodgings as a safe haven to suggest that as a widow she is by no means free to seek sexual gratification with others outside of her home. She dissects each aspect of the bed to further this image of suffering, representing her body in extremely negative terms: restricted, weighed down by the force of her bed, bruised and battered, troubled with worry, and approaching death.[359] In sonnet 81 Coignard takes this theme of discomfort further:

> Chacun me dit: vous estes en mes-aise,
> Vos pas sont lentz, vostre haleine se pert,
> Despuis six mois, despuis le printemps vert,
> Que vous avez la couleur fort mauvaise.[360]

She relies on eyewitness accounts to prove to her future public readers that she is indeed as sick as she says she is. If you do not believe me, then believe the people who have observed me in my ill state, she suggests. This dual image of her body wrapped up in rigidity and decay is most likely a way to pacify her 'chers parens' who wish for her to remarry.[361] She is fixated with the rotting of her body and uses the anguishes of her experience to silence either suspicions or hopes.[362] She is an unattractive suitor, she affirms, and in doing so also deflects attention away from her status as a marriageable widow. But this is also part of Coignard's argument to show that a woman's body, more specifically her body, does not need to be defined in terms of shame or lasciviousness. She is reconfiguring how the female body can be perceived.

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[359] Kathleen M. Llewelyn, 'Passion, Prayer, and *Plume*: Poetic Inspiration in the *Œuvres chrétiennes* of Gabrielle de Coignard', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 88 (2009), 77-86 (p. 80).
[360] Gabrielle de Coignard, '81', in *Spiritual Sonnets*, ll. 1-4, p. 114.
[361] Coignard, '105', l. 2, p. 136.
[362] Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore, *Les femmes dans la société française de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990), p. 437.

Coignard further intensifies her defence against modesty by calling attention to sleep, both in terms of sleepiness and sleeplessness. The latter is at the forefront of her description of her ill state in sonnet 80:

> Apres m'estre en tous lieux cent et cent fois tournée,
> Et faisant enfanter à mes pensers preignans
> Tant d'ennuys et regrets, mon repos esloignans,
> Je passe ainsi la nuict au sommeil ordonnée[363]

Having detailed the pain and constriction that her body undergoes, she escalates tension by shedding light on her restlessness. She uses the hyperbolic time duration of a hundred times to signify that her agitation is eternal; she cannot be left in peace for as long as she lives. Like Madeleine des Roches, she presents herself as a kind of martyr, undergoing suffering that will perhaps lead her to the gates of heaven with God. What keeps her in a state of agitation? It is not simply her pain, but also her mind.

In contrast to Madeleine's depiction of a decaying mind, Coignard's brain is still active but not in a good way. Her 'pensers preignans' generate a plague of 'ennuys et regrets' which torment her. We see here a strong connection between mind and body, which we have already seen Madeleine employ in her poetry; when the mind suffers, the pain manifests itself into something physical. While she points to the torture of her thoughts racing through her mind, the terms 'enfanter' and 'preignans' also point to the fact that these thoughts may not be completely negative, in that they have to do with the concept of artistic creation. As we find with Catherine's employment of the book-as-child topos, perhaps here, Coignard refers to not only the penetration of her body but also the penetration of poetry in her mind. As Mary Thomas Crane has shown in her research of the term 'pregnant' in William Shakespeare's plays, the old French term 'preignant' could refer to something 'pressing' or a convincing argument; in later times the term could mean both 'pregnant' and an argument

[363] Coignard, '80', ll. 5-8, p. 112.

that was 'filled with matter'.[364] This intertwining of meanings, in the context of Coignard's poetry, alludes to her mind being full of highly significant thoughts which inspire her poetry and reiterates the connection of the mind and body. Coignard works against the topos of idleness by suggesting that her pregnant thoughts are not monstrous, but rather through her pain her thoughts symbolize poetic creativity which she generates in the middle of the night. In this description of pain and penetration of poetry, Coignard's writing therefore becomes in intimate diary in which her sonnets record her personal experiences as a loyal Catholic, quite often of intense distress. It is a ritualistic act which gives her some consolation. This highly personal account is furthered by her foregrounding of the personal pronoun 'Je', notifying her audience that she challenges assumptions made about the widow's body in light of her own experience. Restlessness reinforces her interpretation of her body as a non-sexualized object, but it also reveals her alliance with poetry as a way of temporarily healing or soothing her ill state, a concept which we have already located in Madeleine's sickness-related poems.

At times, Coignard plays with restlessness's opposition: the similarly time-related sense of lethargy. In this way, the reader notes that her body seems to work in extremes. Either she is suffering in great agony, tossing and turning, or she is too weak and lethargic to be active. In contrast to the image of sleeplessness in sonnet 80, sonnet 81 reveals a deep lethargy which stops Coignard in her tracks: 'Vos pas sont lentz, vostre haleine se pert'.[365] The shortness of breath and idle steps are signs of impending death according to the unknown people who tell her that she is in pain. This becomes more apparent when she is told explicitly that she is close to dying:

> La fiere mort […]
> Desja pour vous a le sepulchre ouvert[366]

[364] Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 160.
[365] Coignard, '81', l. 2, p. 114.
[366] Ibid., ll. 5-6, p. 112.

Here her sluggishness is expanded to encompass death itself: Coignard is soon to fall into an eternal sleep.

None of this should be read to imply that Coignard does not play with bodily imagery that alludes to something more sexual. This can be seen in her reference to the night, which acts as a motif for suffering.[367] In sonnet 80, the night time adds to the excruciating pain that her body experiences. It acts as a form of pathetic fallacy which draws out nightmarish feelings. She alludes to it twice: 'La nuict m'est une année' and 'Je passe ainsi la nuict au sommeil ordonnée.'[368] While we would expect the night to represent a time of resting and relaxation, perhaps even a temporary numbness of pain for the sick who can sleep, here the night represents something far more sinister. The readers of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* notice that this is impression of the night that resurfaces many times, most notably in sonnet 13:

> La sombre obscurité de la nuict oublieuse,
> D'un voile paresseux vous tient les yeux sillez[369]

The night is a menacing force which robs her of her true self. It leaves her feeling weary and idle, while in sonnet 80 the night time keeps her awake and agitated. This is another moment in which Coignard uses the Petrarchan tropes of her models, Ronsard and Labé, and places them in a religious context. Labé is known for using the night as a symbol of unrequited passion for an unnamed male lover. In sonnet 2, it takes centre stage in revealing her passionate outcry:

> O beaus yeus bruns, ô regars destournez,
> O chaus soupirs, ô larmes espandues,
> O noires nuits vainement atendues,
> O jours luisans vainement retournez[370]

[367] Berriot-Salvadore, *Les femmes*, p. 439.
[368] Coignard, '80', ll. 1, 8, p. 112.
[369] Coignard, '13', ll. 3-4, p. 50.
[370] Louise Labé, 'II', in *Œuvres complètes*, ll. 1-4 p. 122.

Using a *blason*-like structure to begin with, she is overwhelmed by the beauty of her lover and pays attention to each attractive feature. But love is not that simple for her; her lover's absence or potential refusal of her love leaves her feeling distressed. In this context, the long nights that she lives through are symbolic of the restlessness that she feels in love. The nights represent something mysterious and intimate, during which the Petrarchan persona's outcries become intense.[371] In another context, sonnet 9, the night is also associated with love:

> O dous sommeil, o nuit à moy heureuse!
> Plaisant repos, plein de tranquilité.
> Continuez toutes les nuiz mon songe:[372]

While the poet is still split between feelings of ecstasy and suffering, the night represents a time to retire to her intimate lodgings and remind herself of the tender memories that she holds in her breast. The night therefore becomes a time of imagination and dreaming, a way to seek sweet consolation and rest. Labé is by no means the only Petrarchan poet to use the night as an exploration of love. Ronsard employs the motif of the *nuit blanche* in his sonnet 35:

> Puisse avenir, qu'une fois je me vange
> De ce penser qui devore mon cuœur,
> Et qui tousjours, comme un lion vainqueur,
> Soubz soy l'estrangle, & sans pitié le mange.
>
> […]
>
> Mais quand la nuict tient le jour enfermé,
> Il sort en queste, & Lion affamé,
> De mile dentz tout nuict il me ronge.[373]

In this description, Ronsard reflects on his love for his beloved and these thoughts devour him. The night shackles the daytime which is often associated with ecstasy and joy. Now

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[371] Winn, 'Variations', p. 294.
[372] Labé, 'IX', in *Œuvres complètes*, ll. 9-11, p. 126.
[373] Pierre de Ronsard, 'XXXV', in *Les Amours*, ed. by Marc Bensimon and James L. Martin (Paris: GF-Fammarion, 1981), ll. 1-4, 12-14, p. 73.

that the sun has set love, presented as a lion, hunts him down. Night is presented in a nightmarish fashion; it marks a time when the poet is tortured by his amorous thoughts. For Labé and Ronsard, the night is therefore a part of the amorous discourse in Petrarchan poetry. It is a way for the poet to either be restless in love or use it as a time to fall in sweet reverie.

This sexual, passionate element of the night is perhaps what one would expect when Coignard uses it, especially when paired with the restlessness that she evokes in sonnet 80. Coignard certainly plays with a subtle form of sexual intrigue that can be found in her models' works.[374] She plays on potential assumptions they may have about her sexual freedom after her husband's death; they may even be inclined to compare her to Labé's passionate descriptions of an unnamed lover in her private room. However, as we learn more about her rotting body in anguish and the fact that she is exhausted by her illness, the reader's expectations are well and truly thwarted. Firstly playing with sexual imagery, Coignard now adds a different dimension. She shows that an independent woman does not immediately fall into immodesty. In the midst of her widowhood, Coignard remains a woman grieving, and more than this, she shows herself to be a chaste woman with 'honourable reputation' who is loyal to her husband's name.[375] By using Petrarchan imagery and flouting its contemporary associations, Coignard does more than simply show that she is an old and feeble woman approaching death. The anguishes of the night allow her to show a different portrayal of women that does not neatly align with misogynistic discourses of female promiscuity. Instead she allows for more sympathy towards the female body.

This dismantling is seen more clearly when she links her wounded body with female spirituality. Up until now Coignard has shown her readers that she is anything but free as a

[374] Llewelyn, 'Passion', p. 78.
[375] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, p. 88.

widow. She has suffered intensely, both physically and emotionally. Her restlessness in sonnet 80 becomes more complex when she compares herself with pastoral figures:

> Heureux sont les bergers qui dorment sans soucy,
> Sur le vert matelas du printemps doucy,
> Ayant pour pavillon le feuillage d'un chesne,[376]

Opposing herself against these idyllic shepherds, Coignard does not reap the benefits of a beautiful day in spring and sleeping without any worries. Even the unknown witnesses in sonnet 81 seem to agree that Coignard is not in a good state: 'C'est quelque ennui que vous tenez couvert'.[377] Certainly this places her in a vulnerable position in front of her readers. However, the last lines of sonnet 81 seem to allude to something far more profound. The first tercet marks a rupture to the dialogue; she finally responds to those who judge her:

> Je leur responds: vous vous abusez fort,
> Me menaçant de ce pas de la mort,
> C'est le repos de l'ame qui desire
>
> Se delivrer de son fardeau charnel,
> Pour s'en aller au pais eternel
> Jouyr du bien où tousjours elle aspire.[378]

She breaks out of the passive position that she has been placed in up until line 9. Now, the 'Je' reveals an authority that Coignard seizes from her witnesses. Indeed, they are foolish, she implies, for they cannot see that this pain, while evoking sympathy for her, is also a marker of her journey as a Christian. The pain is necessary in order for her to reach the 'pais eternel' and be with God, her second husband. It is a key step, a springboard in order to solidify a strong relationship with God. Gregg, in her edition of Coignard's works, suggests that Coignard sees the body as 'merely an inconvenient obstacle between terrestrial and eternal life.'[379] It is linked to the 'intrinsic depravity and weakness of human nature'.[380] I

[376] Coignard, '80', ll. 9-11, p. 114.
[377] Coignard, '81', l. 7, p. 114.
[378] Ibid., ll. 9-14, p. 114.
[379] See Footnote 36 in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, p. 164.
[380] Melanie E. Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, p. 11.

argue, however, that things are not so simple; Coignard's physical body is not to be rejected so easily, because the pain of the body is what allows Coignard to feel closer to God. As a woman her personal relationship with God allows her to strengthen her intimate connection with this new lover, and in broader terms, to form a special feminine form of Christianity which thrived at the end of the sixteenth century and into the next century.[381]

In the midst of the Counter-Reformation and the popularity of devotional literature, Coignard is an important female religious figure in her ultra-Catholic city of Toulouse, and her poetry is a response to conflict generated in alliance with her fellow Catholics. In her feminized devotion, she reflects a sweetness towards God, even when she is in pain. In her *journal intime*, her *style doux* is paired with an authoritative 'je' which goes beyond a more didactic tone than one might expect with religious literature of the time. The communal and the universal are replaced with a highly individualized account of suffering as a woman, widow, and mother. She discusses her illness, her widowhood and the grief associated with it, even her struggles with loneliness.[382] By laying bare her struggles in poetic form, physical and emotional, she opens up her vulnerabilities and allows God to see her as she truly is; this consoles her grief and justifies her widowed identity. Her reference to 'pensers preignans' in sonnet 80 allow her to write about this experience in poetry and feel closer to God upon her death.[383] In this new personal form of religion, Coignard once again looks to Loyola and Granada as models for a form of penitential exercise.[384] The hyperbolic and introspective expressions of pain create an emotive spirituality which drives the sinner to God through the senses.[385] This deeply individual journey from her earthly concerns to a higher relationship with God incorporates a personal response to modesty which is made

[381] Ferguson, *Feminisation*, p. 187.
[382] Ibid., p. 195.
[383] Coignard, '80', l. 6, p. 112.
[384] Winn, 'Introduction', p. 46.
[385] Winn, 'Variations', p. 300.

possible by the setting of her *cabinet*. Her private setting allows her to move away from a didactic discourse to a more individualized, embodied experience of spirituality, facilitated by the act of writing poetry; her personal account is perhaps something to which other Catholic women of the time could relate.

This connection between Coignard and other women is a concept which her own daughters use to shape a virtuous retrospective image of their mother. Jeanne and Catherine work with printers and editors to have her texts compiled and printed posthumously and write about her qualities in their own dedication. They present her as a *resource* to future women and align her more strongly with her home city of Toulouse. This leads me to explore their role in collaborative modesty.

II.i. Protecting Their Dear Mother: Two Daughters Intervene

Very little is known about Jeanne and Catherine. Coignard used her elite status to provide them with the best educational resources that were not usually available for women at the time.[386] Almost a decade after her death, together her daughters had her *Œuvres chrestiennes* published by Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles in 1594.[387] Their involvement in their mother's publication history is very similar to that of Jeanne d'Albret who sought out an editor to reprint *L'Heptaméron*. As collaborators, Jeanne and Catherine must have exercised influence over editorial decisions such as the specific ordering of the sonnets and aligning Coignard with her late husband as his widow. On the title page of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* she is, as noted above, presented as the 'Vefve a feu Monsieur de Mansencal, Sieur de Miremont, President en la Cour de Parlement de Tolose'.[388] This, Neil Kenny has determined to be an attempt for her daughters to 'cement patriarchal ties' in their 'mediation of a dead

[386] Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', p. 5.
[387] Ibid., p. 15.
[388] See title page of the 1594 edition of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* in Winn, 'Introduction', p. 119.

mother's works.'[389] Intriguingly, this is the only time in which their father is explicitly mentioned, perhaps as a symbol of the absence of their father from their lives, also as a way to claim a 'more worldly status' as unmarried and orphaned children and also to bestow their mother with a high status as the wife of a man who ascended to a prominent position in the *Parlement de Toulouse*.[390]

Jeanne and Catherine provide a particular paratext which is positioned right at the front of the printed book. Their dedication, *Aux Dames devotieuses*, also omits their father; he is only present in the daughters' signature in which the surname 'Mansencal' is used. Other than this, it is Coignard who is praised throughout and of all that they have received from their parents, in life and in death, including monetary items, what is mentioned is a 'literary and maternal' inheritance owing to their mother.[391] Indeed, this text is a way to forge a community of women between them, their mother, and other devout women, especially those who are connected to Toulouse in some way, in order to honour their late mother's morals and poetic talents.

a. Our Mother, A Devout Woman: *Aux Dames devotieuses*

In their address to the devout women in their society, Jeanne and Catherine set up a space in which they may place their mother in the best possible light. As Kenny has stated, their dedication allowed them to present their mother's work for 'the public good' as well as gaining the 'reflect[ed] social glory from it'.[392] They give their readers a picture of what kind of person Coignard was and the ways in which she acts as an example to other women, both as a devout woman and a good mother. They detail the intentions behind her choice to

[389] Kenny, *Born to Write*, p. 80.
[390] Ibid., p. 80.
[391] Ibid., p. 80.
[392] Ibid., p. 80.

write and end by describing the inspirational woman that she looked up to. Through this presentation they hope to revive their mother's name and spirit:

> Nous en userons de mesme et vous viendrons icy desployer et estaler les plus beaux ouvrages d'une Dame devote à de vous incite à luy moyenner encore sur la terre par vos sainctes faveurs, une second et plus belle vie de renommée.[393]

Whilst it is not known if Coignard desired fame and immortality as a poet, to her daughters, fame is a sign that their mother's memory will live on and her spiritual sonnets will be useful for other women's devotion. They award her a level of importance at a time when the Counter-Reformation granted pious women a level of agency.

In order to justify this fame, they provide reasons why their mother should be remembered positively. Firstly, they highlight the fact that she was a simple and honest woman who did not seek to be an established poet. They pair this persuasive dialogue with the unknown editor's own commentary on the various mistakes that she displays in her work. In their dedication they make it clear that she was not a scholar:

> Elle n'estoit n'y avoit desiré d'estre une grande clergesse, non qu'elle n'honorat les sçavantes dames, mais elle disoit que c'estoit savoir tout que n'ignorer point les moyens de son salut[…] Si elle estoit en vie et vouloit publier ses vers, nous ne doutons point qu'elle n'eust fait mesme chois que nous pour les dedier[.][394]

As we know, the status of a learned woman in early modern French society was prone to suspicion. To take on a male's education and vocation was a 'monstrous' act.[395] Jeanne and Catherine persuade their readers that Coignard was not and should not be viewed as a monstrous woman for her time. Instead they suggest that their mother's writing is symbolic of writing as an act of pleasure that is guided by God. Furthermore, they use a 'si' construction and the imperfect tense to suggest that Coignard was not necessarily in favour of having her works printed, at least not publicly.

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[393] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', p. 36.
[394] Ibid., p. 34.
[395] Parker, 'Magnificence', p. 265.

This air of modesty is strengthened when Jeanne and Catherine stress their mother's adherence to gender norms:

> [D]urant son vefvage ayant à commander des filles et à gouverner sa maison sceut si bien mesnager et les heures du jour et les graces d'entendement qu'elle voit receu du ciel, qu'elle en fit ces vers chrestiens tesmoins des vertueuses pensées dont elle entretenoit son esprit et son loisir.[396]

Mimicking similar discourses that are found in Pasquier's letter about the Dames des Roches and their allegiance to housework, Coignard's daughters portray her to be the ideal widow in the domestic sphere. Instead of acting on her supposed autonomy as a widow, she did not neglect her duties as head of the household. Like the Des Roches women, she is described as putting her daily tasks at the forefront of her daily activities. Writing is secondary. Rather than professionalizing her craft, her daughters reduce it to a pastime: she can only write when she has free time. They craft a retrospective image of her as a *femme de bien*.

The strongest virtue that she possesses, of course, is her piety, and this is mentioned at any given opportunity. From the beginning of the dedication, Coignard is named a 'Dame devotieuse' who produces beautiful 'vers devotieux' or 'vers chrestiens'; her poetry remains inextricably linked to her religion.[397] Her daughters show that she is not simply a poet touching on '[themes] dampnables' which conduct manual writer Juan Luis Vives would attribute to an immodest woman; she uses the pen for something more socially and morally acceptable.[398] She does not just write about her experience with God, she also attributes her understanding of the world to him:

> [M]ais osons nous bien dire (puis que la verité nous en donne la hardiesse) qu'elle fit ce que vous lirez en cest œuvre, avec un extreme ardeur de devotion et quant et quant avec une extreme facilité […] C'estoit là sa science, ses preceptes et maximes, les commandemens de Dieu; sa theorique, cognoistre et contempler la bonté, sagesse et puissance divine; sa pratique, les œuvres de misericorde; ses propos et ses escrits, les louanges de Dieu.[399]

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[396] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', p. 34.
[397] Ibid., p. 34.
[398] Vives, *Livre*, p. 43.
[399] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', p. 34.

Jeanne and Catherine forge a retrospective image of a dutiful mother, widow, and daughter of God. Her poetic work is an example of how a Catholic woman should behave and it may guide others to achieve the same life. In other words, Coignard is accompanied by a community of devout women. Included in this community are the devout women who are addressed in Catherine's and Jeanne's dedication. From one group of devout women to another, her daughters use the term 'devote' to connect the two parties; this sanctifies their mother's religious poetry. The second group of women involved in this sisterhood are the daughters themselves. As 'humbles et affectionnées servantes', they portray themselves as having been brought up correctly by Coignard.[400] Moreover, Jeanne and Catherine use models, both contemporary, mythological, and biblical, to praise their mother. They launch a hypothetical discussion about whom Coignard would have chosen as the subject of her dedication had she prefaced her own work:

> [P]eut estre qu'assez loin d'icy elle eut choisi de l'œil du penser ceste illustre et si devotieuse Princesse enfermée dans son Usson, laquelle vivant et marchant encore sur la terre, ne vit et ne hante qu'aux cieux[.][401]

Here they specifically refer to Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Catherine de Medici. She was perceived as a defender of Catholic piety and moral integrity. At one point she was supportive of the Catholic League and due to her rallying of Catholic troops she was imprisoned at the castle of Usson; Coignard's daughters refer to the latter in their dedication.[402] Since Toulouse was also a Catholic bastion for the League, this raises the question about whether Reine Margot has been chosen for a strategic purpose. During the strength of the Counter-Reformation in Toulouse a local readership would view Coignard with the same admiration as they would Marguerite de Valois. Moreover, during her time at Usson, she held a small literary court which included famous figures like Brantôme and

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[400] Ibid., p. 36.
[401] Ibid., p. 34.
[402] Jean-H. Mariéjol, *La vie de Marguerite de Valois, reine de Navarre et de France, 1553-1615* (Paris: Hachette, 1928), p. 139.

Honoré d'Urfé.[403] Similarly, in her court of Nérac, she hosted a successful salon.[404] Her story reveals that during her time one could be admired for venturing into both the arts and religion. It is what Jeanne and Catherine hope to achieve for their mother.

Another woman who reflects Coignard's own virtues is the mythological Clémence Isaure:

> [P]eut estre qu'assez loin d'icy elle eut choisi […] dans ceste ville mesme de sa naissance, elle n'eust eu garde d'oublier ceste venerable Dame mere de nos Prelatz et Gouverneurs, l'exemple et le vray miroir de toute devotion et vertu.[405]

For an early modern *Toulousain*, this reference to Clémence would have been immediately familiar. While there is doubt that a woman called Clémence Isaure actually existed, her name formed part of a cult movement in sixteenth-century Toulouse. Some argue that this elusive figure was the daughter of Louis Isaure, born around 1450; after losing her true love in battle, she remained unmarried and chaste and eventually became a nun.[406] Upon her death she donated her wealth to the continuation of the *Collège de Rhétorique* and city of Toulouse.[407] Others suggest she is purely fictitious and was created by loyal men as a ploy against parliamentary control and taxation.[408] Despite these different theories, many have declared her to be the inspiration behind the establishment and success of the *Jeux Floraux*,.[409] Clémence Isaure was the subject of many dedications written by esteemed poets and writers who took part in the *Jeux*: Jehan Du Pré, Jean Bodin, and Etienne Dolet, to name a few.[410] She became a muse, much like Petrarch's Laura or Dante's Beatrice, and was

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[403] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, p. 150.
[404] Michel Moisan, *L'exil auvergnat de Marguerite de Valois (la reine Margot): Carlat-Usson, 1585–1605* (Nonette: Éditions Créer, 1999), p. 20.
[405] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', p. 34.
[406] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, p. 147.
[407] François de Gélis, *Histoire critique des Jeux Floraux, depuis leur origine jusqu'à leur transformation en académie (1323-1694)* (Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1981), p. 188.
[408] Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, p. 147.
[409] Roberta L. Kruger, 'The Middle Ages and the Renaissance', in F*rench Women Poets of Nine Centuries*, ed. and trans. by Norman R. Shapiro (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), pp. 3-26 (p. 16).
[410] Gélis, *Histoire critique*, p. 198; Schneider, 'Crown', p. 77.

admired for her chastity, piety, and intelligence.[411] Clémence's associations with piety and poetry may be compared with Marguerite de Valois and Coignard; these are the qualities that unite them all. By nature of this categorization, Coignard takes part in a devout sisterhood which places her in a positive light. Moreover, Clémence's particular poetic grounding in Toulouse mirrors Coignard's own relationship with her local surroundings; she is the cherished treasure of Toulouse which her editor proclaims in his own poetic gesture to Coignard's memory. Just as the Des Roches women are strictly tied to Poitiers, Coignard's daughters ensure that her identity is inextricably, and multiply, linked to Toulouse.

A final example of piety which legitimizes Coignard's own piety is Dorcas. Towards the end of their dedication, Jeanne and Catherine pay tribute to the Acts of the Apostles which Coignard herself mentions in her *Hymne sur la louange de la charité*:

> On lict dans les Actes des Apostres que ces bonnes et devotes Dames, pour esmouvoir davantage et susciter le plus grand des Disciples à ramener en vie par ses prieres et par la vertu de Dieu qui l'assistoit, la bonne et devote d'Orcas (de laquelle, celle qui a fait ces vers, fait mention en quelque lieu de ses escrits) luy monstroient les ouvrages qu'elle souloit faire.[412]

They vindicate their mother's position by referring to a biblical passage which reveals that women were able to execute agency through their relationships with God. They find early examples within religion itself to validate all of the devout women involved in this community. Dorcas was a disciple and a widow, renowned for her generous and charitable works. Many mourned her death. More intriguingly, she was resurrected by St Peter. Again, we find that Coignard is being indirectly compared with a holy woman who was admired during her lifetime and afterwards. Like Dorcas, Coignard provides charitable acts through her religious poetry; as Jeanne and Catherine, and the unnamed editor, state themselves, her *Œuvres chrestiennes* will benefit the masses in their own spiritual quests. Additionally, this

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[411] Joseph J. Vaissete, *Histoire Générale du Languedoc, avec des notes et les pièces justificatives*, 16 vols (Paris: Jacques Vincent, 1730-45), IV (1742), p. 78.
[412] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', pp. 34, 36.

story is an analogy for the daughters' collaborative modesty. Like St Peter, they resurrect their mother beyond the grave; they hope to give her a 'second and more beautiful life, one of greater renowned through the publication of her poetry.'[413] Dorcas, together with Marguerite de Valois and Clémence Isaure, validate Coignard's virtues. Through these figures, her daughters wish for readers to see Coignard in the same positive light.

b. A Virtuous Self-Depiction: *Imitation de la victoire de Judich*

These three women are not the only women to accompany Coignard in print. The author of the spiritual sonnets is not a simple, passive figure in the story of collaborative modesty. On the contrary, she plays a more active role in fashioning her own reputation, and exploring her relationship with Toulouse, by way of evoking her literary counterpart, the biblical Judith. The figure of Judith is found in the Old Testament of the Bible; she became a cult figure in the sixteenth century, used by both Catholics and Protestants as an illustration of a *femme forte*.[414] With the revival of devotional literature, figures such as Guillaume du Bartas used her as a model for women. However, writers exploited Judith's story to transform her into an exemplar and also to explore their own interests and concerns.[415] Judith is a brave and chaste warrior, she is known in the Bible for being a loyal widow from the Jewish city of Bethulia. Frustrated with her fellow men who do not trust God to protect them from their conquerors, the Assyrians, she goes to the enemy camp with her maid, Abra, in order to seduce and kill the leader, Holofernes. In his drunken state, she decapitates him in his tent and takes back his head to her homeland. Without a leader, the Assyrians disperse and Israel is saved. In Renaissance France, Judith was held up as an ideal woman, though she was a deeply ambiguous character because of her behaviour. While she was loyal to the virtues of

[413] Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', pp. 6-7.
[414] Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*, p. 13.
[415] Ibid., p. 135.

chastity and piety, she also exhibited seductive and warrior-like qualities, which went against the model of the *femme de bien*. She gained agency by disobeying male leaders and achieving justice for her and her homeland with another woman. In this way she 'represented the fears and aspirations of Renaissance men and women.'[416]

Various writers highlighted different aspects of Judith's character to explore their own interests; Coignard was no different. In recent years scholars have concentrated on how she both focuses on female solidarity in the story between Judith and Abra, and depicts Toulouse's religious conflict through the fictive location of Bethulia.[417] In her *Imitation*, she presents Judith as a Christian ideal and 'glorified image of herself'.[418] She aligns herself with her literary counterpart, a chaste widow who exhibits great courage and piety, and explores her own identity in relation to her location in war-torn Toulouse.

When Coignard begins with a prayer to God to give her the voice to tell Judith's story, she is really asking to be part of a small community of devout women:

> Toi par qui sont tousjours en divers tons unies,
> De ce grand univers les hautes harmonies,
> Accorde mon esprit aux celestes accords,
> Donne moy donc la voix, que je pousse dehors
> Dix mille et milles vers, saints courriers de ta gloire,
> Chantant avec Judich l'hymne de ta victoire.[419]

This community offers her what many women writers could benefit from in a real or fictive sisterhood: 'shelter or security with a sense of belonging, which may bring with it shared objectives and a sense of identity.'[420] Since Coignard's own identity is wrapped up in the *femme de bien* model, it is unsurprising that she chooses to bring out Judith's own allegiance

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[416] Ibid., p. 1.
[417] See Ibid., pp. 75-94; Colette H. Winn and Robert H. McDowell, 'Gabrielle de Coignard: *Imitation de la Victoire de Judich*', in *Writings by Pre-Revolutionary French Women: From Marie de France to Elizabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen and Colette H. Winn (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 171-212; Kathleen M. Llewellyn, 'The Example of Judith in Early Modern French Literature', in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, ed. by Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lähnemann (Cambridge: Open Book, 2010), pp. 213-25.
[418] Winn et al., 'Gabrielle de Coignard', p. 174.
[419] Gabrielle de Coignard, 'Imitation de la victoire de Judich', in *Œuvres chrestiennes*, ll. 5-10, p. 368.
[420] Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*, p. 78.

to this ideal. This is what distinguishes her from other writers who exploited Judith's story. Guillaume du Bartas, for instance, produced a version which was presented to Marguerite de Valois.[421] In his depiction, Judith is objectified by the male gaze. She dresses seductively; in Holofernes's tent she is described as bathed and anointed in perfume and jewels. But due to du Bartas's anxieties about female sexuality, he reassures his readers that she remains chaste and pious.[422] In contrast, Coignard, while maintaining that Judith is beautiful, lauds her more honourable qualities. Indeed, she underlines the virtues that were celebrated in contemporary conduct books for women:[423]

> [Judith] donne l'honneur, le trophée et la gloire
> Au grand Dieu d'Israel, aucteur de sa victoire.[424]

Choosing to protect her city, Judith heads towards the enemy camp as an agent of God. Upon arriving with her maid, she tells the leader of the Assyrians:

> Le Tout Puissant nous en a delivrez,
> S'estant servy de moy, sa treshumble servante,
> Pour donner le repos de la paix abondante[.][425]

She sets up her own private place of prayer and leaves her camp to dedicate her time to prayer. These scenes reflect Coignard's own spiritual aspirations as a servant of God who dedicated her time to confessional poetry and prayer. In her quest to please God and save her home, Judith is extremely wise and eloquent in her discourse; 'd'un sage parler tout rempli de douceur' she speaks to her community with honour and bravery.[426] She reflects her real counterpart, a gifted spiritual poet. Adding to these virtues, chastity is the quality that Coignard highlights the most: 'sa chasteté sur tout fut hautement louée'.[427]

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[421] Paula Sommers, 'Gendered Readings Of *The Book Of Judith*: Guillaume Du Bartas And Gabrielle De Coignard', *Romance Quarterly*, 48.4 (2001), 211-20 (p. 212).
[422] Llewellyn, 'Example of Judith', p. 219.
[423] Winn et al., 'Gabrielle de Coignard', p. 174.
[424] Coignard, 'Imitation', ll. 1321-22, p. 446.
[425] Ibid., ll. 1352-54, p. 448.
[426] Ibid., l. 643, p. 405.
[427] Ibid., l. 630, p. 405.

Wherever possible Coignard attempts to reduce the level of eroticism that transforms Judith into a seductive character.[428] For instance, in the famous scene when Judith tries to seduce a drunken Holofernes, Coignard makes sure that she is never touched by him. Judith does not seduce him, but rather she encourages him to drink. Perhaps anxious about her own alarming status as a widow, she makes Judith an equally virtuous widow. She remains physically modest; her dress reaches down to the floor: 'une robbe elle avoit […] jusqu'aux pieds'.[429] Moreover, her humility is a quality to be admired. Once she has slain her enemy, she returns home in a modest fashion. She presents her quest as an opportunity to honour God for it is He who has saved her and her people:

> Ouvrez hastivement, car le Dieu des batailles
> A faict à ce jourd'huy vertu en Israel.[430]

Coignard distances her adaptation from the Bible and du Bartas's own version; in the presence of the residents of Bethulia she does not sing a canticle to God as the Bible asserts. Instead, she remains silent and the people of Bethulia come together to worship the Lord. Even after the subversive act of disobeying elders and killing the enemy, she hands back agency to her elders and becomes a loyal widow who refuses to remarry, just like Coignard following the death of her husband.

What is the reason behind praising such traditionally female virtues? Coignard affords Judith 'gloire immortelle' and in recoding her story as an exemplar, she also receives her fair share of glory.[431] In a humble way she holds up a mirror to Judith and the readers see Coignard's reflection. The act of writing allows her to immortalize Judith's name and in turn, her own name. While it is not known if she sought immortality for herself, she does

[428] Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*, p. 25.
[429] Coignard, 'Imitation', ll. 843-44, pp. 418-19.
[430] Ibid., ll. 1335-36, p. 447.
[431] Ibid., l. 622, p. 404.

concretize her virtuous image and shapes her readers' impression of her beyond her death. Posterity will laud her for dedicating her life to God.

Coignard's relationship with her home city, Toulouse, is equally striking. Using Judith's story she depicts a war-torn Toulouse and establishes an alliance with her fellow Catholics.[432] Like Toulouse, Judith's Bethulia is a location tainted by conflict. The bastion of the 'true faith' has been attacked by foreign people (Protestants) who threaten peace. Within this context Judith represents a warrior of resistance who fights for her land. In a similar way, Coignard uses her writing to express her staunchly Catholic beliefs. The figure of Judith was employed by both sides of the French religious wars as a tool of propaganda. However, towards the early 1550s Protestant reformers abandoned her for her story was deemed to be inauthentic.[433] Resembling other Catholic writers Coignard reclaims her story as a way of crowning a Catholic Toulouse and aligning herself to these surroundings. Judith's great sword, used to decapitate her enemy, is symbolic of Coignard's own heroic *plume*.[434] The two women are one and the same: they establish their identities in relation to their homelands. In the midst of conflict they take up the pen/sword to defend their faith. Coignard's spiritual poetry becomes a monument which defends the Catholic faith and gives agency and honour to devout women who may serve God through writing. So too ends her daughters' compelling dedication:

> Recevez donc d'aussi bon cœur qu'ils vous sont offerts ces monumens devotieux de l'esprit de la mere (Dames devotieuses) avec la devotion des filles à vostre obeissance, qui demeueront tousjours, s'il vous plaist[.][435]

Like Coignard herself in *Imitation*, they plea for their mother to be heard and to be remembered as a virtuous woman from Toulouse, above all else. With the help of male

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[432] Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*, p. 26.
[433] Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 191.
[434] Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*, p. 93.
[435] Mansencal et al., 'Aux Dames', p. 36.

collaborators to strengthen this message, as we shall see in Chapter 4, her readers' retrospective image of this devout woman remains wholly positive.

Conclusion

Thus, from *femme de bien* to *femme forte*, Coignard is offered a great deal of agency in and by her writing. Beginning with an examination of her spiritual sonnets, we identify two responses to modesty which engage with an empowering discussion of the female body. By being aligned with God, her body (in pain) takes on new meaning; it is honourable and it becomes a vessel of divine inspiration. Using her own body as a differently accented example she also promotes a more sympathetic view of her widowhood, calling attention to the wrath of time and old age which has left her weary and tortured. As a necessary aspect of her relationship with God, we understand that the body is more than just a container for sin, as most scholars have put it; it is a springboard for her experience of a feminized Christianity, which gives women agency during religious schism in France. By nature of this she rewrites her female body as one which is divinely ordained; it elevates towards the celestial world where she can connect with God, her second husband. This is not to say that she does not play with erotic discourses in her relationship with the spiritual world. Intense, sensual feelings of the amorous female body are justified when they are projected towards God and supported by the models of Loyola and Grenada. Petrarchan imagery in both of her responses to modesty can be altered to suit Coignard's own interests to defend her independent status and explore her devotional identity, facilitated by the intimate space of the *cabinet*. This *cabinet*, while one the one hand, a very personal space between Coignard and God, also becomes a place for an imagined readership. The exploration of her own devotional and personal, physical identity transforms her *cabinet* into a public space. By way of her public voice, which projects outwards, her *cabinet* goes beyond her *toulousain* setting to encompass different locations. Coignard presents herself as a *resource* for the

feminization of devotion; her sonnets transcend time to inspire a new generation of Christian women.

As we know, Coignard's poetry is published by her daughters late in the sixteenth century, a period during which a certain type of woman could find her place in print. As a Christian poet writing during the Counter-Reformation, Coignard has a slightly easier transition into the public sphere than other women in this study. That is not to say, however, that her authorship does not benefit from different forms of collaborative modesty. Concluding the mother-daughter story, Coignard's daughters create a community of women who offer each other security and companionship, and set the tone for how readers, contemporary and future, should perceive their late mother. Moving away from her spiritual sonnets, we also see how Coignard's own *Imitation* contributes to this community of women, while achieving something quite different to her poetic responses to modesty. Using the figure of Judith to endorse her own widowed identity, her version of the biblical story is also a response to the city of Toulouse which she shows allegiance to in her confessional work. Beyond the *cabinet*, Toulouse and her poetry are an extension and analogy of her Catholic identity, which her daughters reinforce in their transformation of Coignard into an exemplary female figure and an ally to the Counter-Reformation devotional cause in a city under siege.

Indeed, in the stories of all of the women writers and poets in this study, daughters facilitate the production and circulation of their mothers' texts. From Marguerite de Navarre, to the Dames des Roches and finally to Coignard, the link between printing and promiscuity varies over time, and important parallels and distinctions are found in the ways in which collaborators present and protect women writers from public scrutiny. Not only do these matters further question modesty's prominence in early modern French society, but also, they open up a space to explore moments in which women writers exercise agency. This

agency is not achieved solely through the efforts of daughters, however important they are. The reality of sixteenth century France required a reliance on male peers – editors, printers and writers, for example – who accompanied women in print with their support and guidance. This reliance was not necessarily a sign of a woman writer's submission but rather an acceptance that this dependence could offer her freedom to maneuver in a traditionally male space. This male collaborative form of literary production will now be discussed in my fourth and final chapter.

Chapter 4: Male Networks of Collaborative Modesty: Print, Protection, and Promiscuity in Sixteenth-Century France

Introduction

As we have seen in the works of my chosen women writers, modesty is a virtue against which early modern women are judged. In the realm of literature, these women writers explore, reconfigure, and contest the dictates of modesty, and its connotations, and in doing so gain agency for themselves and other women. Influenced by their local surroundings, their nuanced stances represent an empowering move to seek an authoritative literary voice and redefine the female body within the confines of a male-dominated society. As we know from this study thus far, all four women found a name in print, either in their lifetime or posthumously. The transformation of their works from manuscript to print was a collective effort, as is the case in many works of literature, involving a number of participants who shape the texts and their authors. Thus far we have witnessed women writing to, for and against women, and we have explored the important role that daughters have played in this process. Jeanne d'Albret, Catherine des Roches, and Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal each contributed to the composition, publication, and reception of their mother's works in different ways. Their participation in literary collaboration helps us to think about women's writing as a creative process that can take place between female family members.

Much like the final scene of Marguerite's *Comédie*, however, this chapter reintegrates these women into the world of men. While mothers and daughters were instrumental in these women writers' printing histories, they nonetheless needed the collaboration of men in this process. Male editors, printers, and other writers were necessary

players strongly influencing women writers' literary pursuits in the public sphere of print. Thus, while these men in one sense reinforced societal restrictions on women, demonstrating that the women required male companionship in print to preserve their honour, they simultaneously offered them striking degrees of agency. The stakes were high at a time in which there were few female models to follow; not least because a woman writer, especially one who commented on modesty in her works, compromised her own modesty by stepping into the sphere of print.

Women writers were caught in a difficult dilemma; their desire to write left them vulnerable to losing their good reputation as obedient, virtuous women. Yet, as is evident in scholarship, despite the vulnerable positions that they were in, the four women in this study maintained positive reputations in the public sphere. Moreover, as Coignard's story has shown, moving towards the end of the century, a woman's entry need not be so controversial if she represented a more socially acceptable type of devout women. In alliance with the growing influence of the Counter-Reformation and devotional literature, Coignard is a woman who joins a growing collective of spiritual female writers who weaken the connection between print and promiscuity.

The importance of associations between print and sexual deviance becomes more intriguing in light of male collaborative modesty, a creative response to a complex nexus of modesty, print production and circulation, and female authorship, which forms the focus of this final chapter. In the composition, publication, and reception of my chosen women writers' texts, we find a number of male agents who act either from behind the scenes, or more publicly in their own dedications, to ensure the transition of women's manuscripts into print. The collective of male peers, most notably Clément Marot, François Rabelais, Jehan Du Pré and Simone Sylvius reinforce Marguerite's reputation as a virtuous *femme de bien*. By drawing attention to her modest nature, they justify her entry into print. Later in the

sixteenth century, the Des Roches women are offered initial protection by male intellectuals who interacted with them at their salon meetings and enabled their entry into print. The mother-daughter bond which the Des Roches strategically use as a public identity is itself somewhat influenced by the already-existing discourses of maternal affection which their male peers circulate widely. Coinciding with the public acceptance of a Christian woman in print, Coignard's posthumous authorship is facilitated by prominent *Toulousains* printers, Pierre Jagourt and Bernard Carles, and an unnamed editor of the first edition of the *Œuvres chrestiennes*. They position her in relation to her late husband, Pierre de Mansencal. Coignard herself strengthens her religious image in relation to the Catholic Apollo, Ronsard.

In the publication (her)stories of all four women, we note in this chapter a number of similarities in the ways in which male collaborators depict them, drawing specific attention to their womanly virtues and talents. Subtle differences between them equally highlight the prominent features that distinguish these dedicatees from others of the time: Marguerite's androgynous nature, the Dames des Roches' maternal-filial bond and Coignard's devotion. Collaborative modesty is thus not uniform, but rather shaped by the particular interests and circumstances of different early modern women writers. What these networks do share is their fundamental role in negotiating the transition of women's works into print; they are active participants in literary production and, along with the mother-daughter bonds explored thus far, call into question the ways in which we have traditionally perceived the connection between modesty and authorship, *pudeur* and print, during this period.

I. Marguerite de Navarre

i. A Mutually Beneficial Alliance

Marguerite was no ordinary woman; she was the sister to the King of France and the Queen of Navarre. Unlike the other women in this study, she experienced a very privileged

upbringing and influence on French court and society. As the daughter of a nobleman she was granted a traditionally male humanist education that was generally inaccessible to women and unusually thorough, even for a noblewoman. Her education was largely facilitated by her mother, Louise de Savoie, which further emphasizes the importance of mother-daughter relationships within Marguerite's family. She was taught the rudiments of Latin and Greek, philosophy and the Bible, and would often spend her time immersed in manuscripts in the libraries of Blois, Angoulême and Cognac.[1] This education and passion for learning gave her the tools to produce her vast literary output, ranging from religious poems such as *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, to religious and secular theatre and the extensive *L'Heptaméron*.

Her networks with prominent figures of the time reinforced this privileged access to literature. She was favoured by men and women alike and had notable correspondences with figures including Philip Melanchthon and Vittoria Colonna.[2] Her influence was by no means restricted to the court of Nérac. Marguerite frequently visited Lyon; she most likely took part in intellectual discussions with important humanists of the time.[3] She encouraged women and offered them support both at her court in Nérac and elsewhere. Marie Dentière, a Reformed thinker, wrote her epistle for Marguerite; defenders of the female sex, such as Marie de Romieu and Anne Malet de Graville, held her up to be a 'shining example' for other women.[4] In this way, Marguerite's life becomes exemplary; she inspires a historical line of women and solidifies a companionship between women writers, spanning space and time.

With her brother's accession to the French throne in 1515, her influence reached new heights in the political sphere. She became Francis's personal *confidante* and diplomat. She

[1] Dale, 'Introduction', p. x.
[2] Stjerna, *Women*, p. 154.
[3] Akerlund, *French Women Writers*, p. 5.
[4] Ibid., p. 4.

was awarded her own ducal peerage from which she was entrusted to settle grievances in Berry and receive an income.[5] During wars she visited soldiers on the battlefield and negotiated treaties, such as the famous *Paix des Dames* of 1529, to try and ensure peace between Francis I and Emperor Charles V.[6] Her wit and charm won over a number of ambassadors during visits to the French court.[7] Alongside this, she reinforced her womanly duties by establishing hospitals and orphanages, such as *L'Hospice des Enfants-Rouges* in 1534, which provided care and education for children.[8] This ability to operate in both male and female spheres granted Marguerite the opportunity to form important networks and achieve an autonomy that many women could not possess.

She was thus already a public figure who had a much higher social status than the other women in this study, before moving into print. Moreover, she did not have to face the stigma of being attached to the 'lower-class activity' of publication that elite men and women had to counteract.[9] Her elevated social status protected her in some measure from this stigma. However, this did not mean that her presence in the printing sphere was viewed without suspicion; her transgression into the public sphere was simply of a different order compared to other women writers such as the Dames des Roches and Coignard. Despite her powerful connections and freedom to manoeuvre in various political and literary spheres, her independence in print was not absolute; witness the publication of what has been perceived by some as her highly controversial *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* in 1531, followed by an even more controversial edition in 1533. This religious poem was supposedly heavily criticized by theologians of the Sorbonne for its Reformed thinking. It was the

[5] Jonathan A. Reid, *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) and Her Evangelical Network*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2009), I, p. 89.
[6] Dale, 'Introduction', p. viii.
[7] Nicole Cazauran and Sabine Lardon, 'Avant-Propos', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Œuvres completes: I Pater Noster et Petit Œuvre dévot*, ed. by Nicole Cazauran and Sabine Lardon, 9 vols (Paris: Champion, 2001-2007), I (2001), pp. 7-10 (p. 7).
[8] Akerlund, *French Women Writers*, p. 21.
[9] Wall, *Imprint*, p. 281.

King's personal intervention, the intervention of a highly influential monarch, which lifted its prohibition and restored Marguerite to favour.[10] Such male notable figures were therefore instrumental in mitigating the vulnerability of Marguerite's good name in public, deflecting attention away partly from her position as an immodest woman in print, but mainly her Reformist views, in the efforts of publicizing her voice with ease and upholding her honour.

ii. Defending a Woman(?) Like No Other

Certainly, as a member of the royal family, Marguerite was 'au-dessus de beaucoup de préjugés et des stigmatizations de la bourgeoise lectrice',[11] however she still benefitted from a 'premier parapet éditorial'[12] which often accompanied a woman writer's name on title pages. This not only insisted on the woman's moral and social qualities ('Marguerite des Princess, tres illustre royne de Navarre'[13]) but also covered up her religious views and the rather vulgar action of wanting to publish her works, a 'dangereux signe de débauche.'[14] We also find this strategy played out in the works of the Dames des Roches, anxious not to 'salir d'encre les ourlets des beaux vêtements féminins…ainsi que [leurs] reputations'.[15] Jean de Tournes was a useful contact as printer of the *Marguerites* volumes. As a highly regarded printer, his signature on the title pages marked a stamp of approval on Marguerite's literary works; it held the symbolic value that an illustrious printer could validate Marguerite's status as a writer. By attaching himself to her name, he in turn presented himself as an intellectual guide, accompanying Marguerite in public not only to protect her but also to keep her on the path to modesty and virtue. He employs a cautious paratextual strategy of male

[10] Dale, 'Introduction', p. ix. The full extent of the controversy over the *Miroir* is disputed: it was, after all, reprinted (by the same printer) twice in 1533 after the Sorbonne's intervention. See Jean-Marie Le Gall, 'Marguerite de Navarre: The Reasons for Remaining Catholic', in *A Companion to Marguerite*, pp. 59-87 (pp. 60, 63-66).
[11] Ganaza, 'L'Écriture', p. 434.
[12] Ibid., p. 434.
[13] See title page in Navarre, *Suyte des Marguerites*, p. 1.
[14] Ganaza, 'L'Écriture', p. 434.
[15] Ibid., p. 434.

accompaniment and intellectual fatherhood which has been traced in a number of women writers' works.[16] The coinage of printers and editors as 'passeurs du texte' in recent scholarship emphasizes the significance of these figures in legitimizing writers in print and facilitating the transmission of texts in different spaces.[17] As Marguerite's *passeur du texte*, de Tournes opened up new opportunities to diffuse and further validate her works within commercial, political, cultural and literary networks. His connections with participants of the *École lyonnaise*, many of whom were women and/or wrote in favour of women during the *Querelle des femmes* helped Marguerite to solidify links with pro-women advocates. It also demonstrates an interesting power play between Marguerite and her male counterparts. Despite her much higher status compared to de Tournes, she needed him to carry out her wishes. It suggests that in the printing sphere, at least, a man from a lower rank could be equally powerful as women like Marguerite who were from a socially higher status. We also find this in the context within which the *Marguerites* were compiled. While certain scholars have stated that it was Marguerite who collated her works for print, the official 1547 printed edition names Sylvius as the agent who took the lead.[18] There is something to be said about Marguerite's private agency clashing with a more public image of male dominance. If we believe Marguerite to have personally compiled her works, then we can only interpret the decision to name Sylvius as the lead collator, orchestrated either by de Tournes or by Marguerite herself, as an acceptance of the fact that her work would be better received if presented as the product of a man's desire to make it known publicly, especially, perhaps, in light of Marguerite's controversial religious views.

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[16] Ibid., p. 436.
[17] See Christine Bénévent, Annie Charon, Isabelle Diu, and Magali Vène, eds, *Passeurs de Textes: Imprimeurs et libraires à l'âge de l'humanisme* (Paris: École des Chartes, 2012).
[18] See Reynolds-Cornell, 'Marguerite', p. 270; Marguerite de Navarre, *Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses, tresillustre royne de Navarre*, 2 vols (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1547), I, p. 2; Ganaza, 'L'Écriture', p. 435.

Another example of editing which makes Marguerite's posthumous reputation more presentable to the public eye is found in Claude Gruget's edition of *L'Heptaméron*, commissioned by her daughter, Jeanne: the removal of scandal in the form of novella 11; Gruget replaces it with the story of a Franciscan preacher whose lecherous sermons outrage his congregation. As is well known, novella 11 is a humorous story about Madame de Roncex's unfortunate incident in a Franciscan monastery in which 'elle se trouv[e] prise mieulx que à la glux, et toutes ses pauvres fesses, habillemens, et pieds si merveilleusement gastez' with faeces.[19] The men of the court, who believe her to be the victim of rape, find her bare-bottomed and soiled.

Tales which discussed excrement and other foul jokes were commonplace in early modern literature,[20] especially in the works of Nicholas de Troyes, Noël du Fail, Bonaventure Des Periers, Guillaume Bouchet and Etienne Tabourot, not to mention Rabelais.[21] The number of male humoristic writers in existence suggests that coarse humour of the sixteenth century was primarily in the domain of men.[22] This novella, no matter how funny or in line it is with humour of the time, potentially tarnishes Marguerite's good name for she is perceived as making fun of a woman's dishonour and modesty itself. An accident has unfairly taken away Roncex's modesty, a very serious matter, and yet it is she who – eventually – laughs about it: '[elle] changea sa chollere à rire comme les aultres'.[23] Female honour becomes the object of ridicule.[24] By engaging in the mockery, Roncex reveals a 'personal triumph over public humiliation'.[25] While certain scholars have seen this as a symbolic episode of sexual assault in which Roncex is the victim of a rapist's desire to see

[19] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 165.
[20] Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*, p. 106.
[21] Polachek, 'Scatology', 33.
[22] Ibid., 33.
[23] Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, p. 166.
[24] In Baldesar Castiglione's highly influential *The Book of the Courtier*, the prominent Italian courtier warns against making fun of a woman's honour. See Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by George Bull (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 187.
[25] Polachek, 'Scatology', 39.

her sexual parts, the final burst of laughter suggests that the story is more preoccupied with the arbitrariness of modesty;[26] it makes 'chastity the butt of laughter' by showing that modesty cannot protect a woman from dishonourable situations.[27] She is better off relying on wit and laughter to remove herself from compromising situations.[28] The argument here is not that Marguerite seeks to completely undermine modesty in the original story; after all, the multiplicity of viewpoints in *L'Heptaméron* (much as we have seen in the *Comédie*) places more emphasis on debate and discussion than firm answers. And yet Gruget, presumably with Jeanne's approval, does not leave Marguerite's intentions, if any, open for debate. The removal of novella 11 reveals, I argue, a desire to protect Marguerite's modest image. To justify her entry into print, Gruget must mitigate the threat of public outrage, which includes censoring Marguerite to fit the dictates of public decency.

In Marguerite's lifetime, her pool of collaborators was bolstered by the personal alliances that she formed from her highly influential patronage of contemporary male literary figures. Her role as patroness stemmed from a line of royal females, such as her own mother, Louise de Savoie, and Anne de Bretagne who operated in royal courts to promote social and artistic endeavours.[29] The introduction of new humanist thinking allowed Marguerite to establish a salon with academics, writers, and reform-inclined thinkers. She could engage in intellectual exchange with public men in the comfort of a domestic setting. Among the many participants of Marguerite's salon was the Meaux group which discussed teachings of Christianity and Neo-Platonism.[30] As a prominent member of the royal family, she received requests for patronage and alliance from many poets and writers, and she even went as far

[26] Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*, p. 110.
[27] Hendrix, 'Reclaiming the Ornament of Wit', 69.
[28] Ibid., 70.
[29] Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 181.
[30] Cholakian *et al.*, *Marguerite*, p. 67.

to give some of them protection in her court of Nérac during religious conflict.[31] The hierarchical structure of the poet serving Marguerite the patroness was mutually beneficial. While the ambitious poet or writer received financial gain and a notable reputation from his ties with Marguerite, in return she was depicted as an admirable *femme de bien*. Dedications written in praise of Marguerite awarded her the male seal of approval as an esteemed writer in print.

Ever since Marguerite's conflict with the Sorbonne following the publication of the *Miroir*, she became the subject of suspicion and, at times, harsh criticism.[32] Any further publications needed to be justified and clearly supported by those who could protect her reputation and modesty. One means of addressing this was to stress the fact that despite being a woman, she was an intellectually gifted writer whose works deserved to be published. This theme emerges in the dedications offered to Marguerite by other writers in her circle and beyond it. Due to the potential benefits of esteem and protection, it is perhaps no surprise that Marguerite received several dedicatory works by male literary figures.[33] Dedications were certainly a useful means to construct a positive image of their patroness and shape the ways in which she was perceived in the public sphere. In numerous prefaces and epistles, we find a number of illustrious titles and identities that are bestowed upon Marguerite: Estienne Dolet names her 'la seule Minerve de France', Mellin Saint-Gelais names her the 'nourrice' of Pallas, goddess of wisdom, the arts and warfare.[34] In both volumes of the *Marguerites*, we also find poems written by Maurice Scève, a well-known Lyonnais poet in his own right who was a participant of the *École lyonnaise*. He ensures that

[31] Akerlund, *French Women Writers*, p. 13.
[32] Ganaza, 'L'Écriture', p. 436.
[33] François Génin provides a list of male poets and writers who dedicated their works to Marguerite. See François Génin, 'Notice sur Marguerite d'Angoulême, sœur de François I[er], reine de Navarre', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Lettres de Marguerite d'Angoulême*, ed. by François Génin (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1841), pp. 1-144 (p. 140).
[34] Ibid., pp. 140, 60.

her exemplary qualities are made known to her readers. For instance, in his preface of the first volume he awards her the title of 'tresillustre & tresvertueuse'.[35] In the second volume, he writes to her daughter, Jeanne, and depicts her mother as a 'celeste Aurore'[36] who 'saintement ce Monde emperle & dore'.[37] In his poem, Marguerite's virtues shine bright; she is perceived as an illustrious figure who brings glory to her time and she will forever be remembered for her virtues, Scève proclaims. Both of his prefaces are physically inserted in the texts as a layer of protection around her immodest words in print. Much like de Tournes, Scève is perceived as a figure who accompanies her in print.

Alongside this, a number of other dedications endorse Marguerite's decision to print. These include Clément Marot's *De Madame la Duchesse d'Alençon* from his *Adolescence Clémentine* (1532), François Rabelais's preface to *Le Tiers Livre, À l'esprit de la royne de Navarre* (1543), Jehan Du Pré's *Le Palais des nobles dames* (1534), and Simon Sylvius's *A tresillustre & treschrestienne Princesse, Madame la Princesse de Navarre* (1547) which is formally dedicated to Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne. These men were all closely connected to Marguerite; Sylvius (de la Haye) was Marguerite's *valet de chambre* and collaborator of the *Marguerites* volumes, and the other men benefitted from Marguerite's patronage. Of course, patronage is mutually beneficial to both parties; these poems which laud Marguerite also seek, as already stated, protection from her. For instance, Marot and Rabelais were humanist writers and religiously contested authors; they saw Marguerite as a friend who could give them refuge. Marot was a personal friend and courtier who was afforded her protection even when he fled France because of his beliefs,[38] while Rabelais was named a

[35] Maurice Scève, 'Aux Dames des vertus de la tresillustre & tresvertueuse Princesse Marguerite de France, Royne de Navarre devotement affectionees', in Navarre, *Marguerites*, p. 12.
[36] Maurice Scève, 'A tresillustre & tresvertueuse Princesse Madame Iane Infante de Nauarre', in Navarre, *Suyte des Marguerites*, l. 1, p. 2.
[37] Ibid., l. 4, p. 2.
[38] Akerlund, *French Women Writers*, p. 80.

Maître des Requêtes in 1534 and maintained good relationships with the court, especially with Marguerite and her brother, until he fled from religious persecution to Metz.[39]

We see their desire for protection in their dedications, with Rabelais's references to Neoplatonism and Marot's description of Marguerite as a 'monstre fort estrange', a common (paradoxically positive) way of describing a learned woman.[40] These references are also used to legitimize their protection from a powerful female monarch. The dual nature of patronage, however, does not detract importance from the fact that these male poets highlight Marguerite's qualities, and in doing so strengthen her place in print and shape the opinion that the public has of her. Together the four works in question construct common identities about Marguerite. To make their case for her public position, they draw attention to different aspects of her character: Marguerite is 1) intellectually gifted, 2) an exemplary figure, 3) in alliance with gender ideals of the time, 4) and finally, unlike the rest of the women in this study, she is depicted as an awe-inspiring, exceptional individual, monster-like: a kind of hybrid fe/male figure. These qualities serve to protect Marguerite's public reputation in sixteenth-century society; they reinforce her modesty and facilitate her entry in print.

In fact, the image of the erudite woman writer or poet is presented in the dedications of all women involved in this study. As part of their cautious rhetoric, male collaborators suggest that the writers' intellectual talents are too brilliant to go unnoticed. We find this particularly with the Des Roches women, whose rare and exceptional talents are praised by their peer, Scévole de Sainte-Marthe, who depicts their salon as an 'Academie d'honneur'.[41] In a similar fashion, Marot emphasizes Marguerite's intellect. He returns the favour to his

[39] Cathleen M. Bauschatz, 'Rabelais and Marguerite de Navarre on Sixteenth-Century Views of Clandestine Marriage', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34.2 (2003), 395-408 (p. 396).
[40] Clément Marot, 'De Madame La Duchesse d'Alençon', in *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. by Yves Giraud (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1973), l. 8, p. 10.
[41] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 361.

royal patroness by highlighting her 'haulte valeur'.[42] Reinforcing the high pedestal on which she has been placed, he draws attention to the 'esprit angelique' which 'onc aux cieux volla'.[43] As scholars have suggested, Marguerite and Marot shared not only a deep friendship but also a mutual intellectual relationship; they often exchanged verses.[44] It is no surprise, then, that in other poetic dedications, he reinforces his admiration for her writing; he calls attention to the fact that his 'Dame escript si hault et doulcement'.[45] It is difficult not to 's'en esmerveiller' when he watches 'sa plume travailler'.[46] With similar intentions, Rabelais maintains favour with his lady by way of accentuating her impressive mind. He introduces Marguerite as an 'esprit abstraict', alluding to a higher awareness, which remains obscure to the average person.[47] Rabelais partly includes this image to refer to her wisdom and interest in Mysticism.[48] He admired her own interest in humanism and her thirst for knowledge.[49] He mentions her 'esprit […] ravy et ecstatic' which is placed in opposition to her 'corps concords'.[50] It is this separation of the mind and body which demonstrates an affinity between the two parties. Rabelais draws attention to their mutual understanding, as humanist and erudite thinkers, of Neoplatonist thought which entails a distinction between more earthly and celestial matters. In doing so he lays bare her educational grounding and demonstrates that just like a man she is able to comprehend intellectual matters. It is his and Marot's dedications which subtly contend that her understanding is not only rare for a woman, but also merits public expression. In comparison to the presentation of the Dames

[42] Marot, 'De Madame', l. 1, p. 10.
[43] Ibid., ll. 5-6, p. 10.
[44] Génin, 'Notice', p. 41.
[45] Clément Marot, 'De la Royne de Navarre', in *Œuvres poétiques*, l. 2, p. 370.
[46] Ibid., l. 6, p. 371.
[47] François Rabelais, *Le Tiers Livre*, ed. by Michael A. Screech (Geneva: Droz, 1964), l. 4, p. 1. On Rabelais's preface, see Mary McKinley, 'Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre, et la dédicace du *Tiers Livre*: voyages mystiques et missions terrestres', *Romanic Review* 94.1 (2003), 169-83.
[48] Michael A. Screech, *Rabelais* (London: Duckworth, 1979), p. 91.
[49] Katherine Kong, 'Writing Love in the Thirteenth *Nouvelle*: Marguerite de Navarre's Epistolary Fictions', *Romance Quarterly*, 58 (2011), 144-57 (p. 149).
[50] Rabelais, *Tiers Livre*, ll. 1, 4, p. 1.

des Roches, as we shall see, Marguerite is shown to be a marvel in the literary world, and for that reason she deserves a place in the world of print.

Sylvius takes this idea even further; in his address to Jeanne, he highlights her mother's extraordinary talents with the extended metaphor of a flower blooming. This image is often used in dedications of the women in this study:[51]

> [F]leur tousjours fleurissant […]
> Fleur qui les fruitz porte,[52]

Flower imagery forges an image of Marguerite as a rare work of nature which continues to thrive. It feminizes her and points to her ability to be fruitful. The works that she produces are abundant and rich in intellectual discussion. He goes on to explicitly refer to the 'beaux vers mesurez' which are 'tous d'or', 'surpassans ceux d'Orphee'.[53] To say that she surpasses the mythological Greek poet and musician in her writing is to further underline that Marguerite should be openly lauded as one of the great writers of his century. Their unique and special quality will be remembered for years to come, long after her death. Certainly Sylvius, Marot, and Rabelais are not the only men to highlight Marguerite's intellect. As figures such as Erasmus note, in his letter to her, many were aware of her charming 'esprit' which so easily captivated 'gens de bien et de science'.[54] Indeed, his reason for contacting her, he states, was because many esteemed men spoke highly of her knowledge. Working alongside the images that fellow men have conjured up, Marguerite pairs this with her own modesty trope, a strategy which many early modern women writers used in their paratexts.[55] We find this immediately after Sylvius's dedication in the *Marguerites*. As an introduction

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[51] We find this very image in Estienne Pasquier's portrayal of the Des Roches women as 'belles fleurs'. See Estienne Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Sieur de Savoye, Advocat en la Cour de Parlement de Paris.', in *Les lettres d'Estienne Pasquier*, pp. 186-89 (p. 187).
[52] Simon Sylvius, 'A tresillustre & treschrestienne Princesse, Madame la Princesse de Navarre', in Navarre, *Marguerites*, ll. 35, 39, p. 4.
[53] Ibid., l. 93, p. 6.
[54] Erasmus, '31. - Érasme A Marguerite, Duchesse d'Alençon', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Lettres de Marguerite d'Angoulême*, p. 185 (28 September 1525).
[55] See Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing*.

to her volume, there appears an address to her readers which it is implied that she has written; here she shows her readers what is wrong with her writing:

> Arrestez vous
> En excusant la rhythme, & le langage
> C'est d'une femme l'ouvrage:
> Qui n'ha en soy science, ne sçavoir,
>
> […]
>
> Je vous requires, prenez la patience
> Lire du tout ceste œuvre, qui n'est rien:
> Et n'en prenez seulement, que le bien.[56]

In this address, she uses her gender as a means of excusing everything that she lacks: rhythm, a good use of vocabulary, knowledge. These are precisely qualities which the men themselves implicitly or explicitly praise. Underpinning her own self-deprecation, this address bolsters the perception of her as not only intellectually admirable, as the men suggest, but also humble, indeed modest, about her talents.

This collective, male authorization of her intellect is further strengthened by her exemplarity in respect of other women. In his *Palais*, Du Pré presents her as a model for her contemporaries. In his preface, he dedicates his work to Marguerite as an illustrious woman of the time. In this very paratext, he notes that the premise of his book is to 'defendre la querelle des honnestes femmes'.[57] This political statement sheds light on his own intervention in the *Querelle des Femmes*; it solidifies his aim to combat the views of misogynistic writers of the past and present denounce women in their 'libelles reprehensifz'.[58] Placing Marguerite into this history, he creates an imaginary palace, with thirteen rooms and a garden; each room hosts a group of notable woman who are positive examples of womanhood. Drawing attention to their courage, chastity, and other admirable

[56] Marguerite de Navarre, 'Marguerite de France, par la grace de Dieu Royne de Navarre, au Lecteur', in *Marguerites*, ll. 2-5, 28-30, pp. 13-14.
[57] Jehan Du Pré, *Le Palais des Nobles Dames*, ed. by Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), p. 95.
[58] Ibid., p. 103.

qualities, he champions figures like Marguerite. He dedicates the whole work to her and allocates a special section to her in the garden; we may be inclined to see this gesture as demonstrative of her role as the ultimate female exemplar. She is exemplary because she is an excellent poet:

> [Elle fait] rondeaulx, et compos[e] epistres,
> Et maintes œuvres de tresexcellens tiltres[59]

Instead of chastising her desire to write, Du Pré commends her dedication to the arts. By inserting this aspect of her life into a book about illustrious female models, he suggests that women writing forms part of this exemplarity. To retain favour with his patroness, he states that it is she who 'port[e] le guydon' of the room filled with exemplary *femmes savantes*.[60] Once again, placing Marguerite next to other virtuous women, he underlines her own virtues as a writer and presents her as a model for other intellectual women to emulate. He shows that she is an honourable *femme de bien* who is admired by men and women alike, especially 'gens de science'.[61] Comparatively, Sylvius suggests that Marguerite should be admired for her virtuous nature. To flatter his patroness, he suggests that her name will be immortalized:

> L'immortel nom de celle Marguerite
> Qui de vertu la couronne merite,
> Et de sçavoir; qui a oultrepa[ss]é
> Tous les espritz du bon siècle passé[62]

He crowns her as the epitome of virtue, and by association, an example for others to follow. Much like Le Grand's appreciation of the Des Roches' writing talents, Sylvius indicates Marguerite's own intellectual superiority which has surpassed other men and women of her time. She is placed on a pedestal, and becomes one of the great figures of her century whose talents others will imitate.

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[59] Ibid., ll. 1520-21, p. 177.
[60] Ibid., l. 1524, p. 177.
[61] Ibid., l. 1522, p. 177.
[62] Sylvius, 'A tresillustre & treschrestienne Princesse', ll. 97-100, p. 7.

With these images of intellectual and moral exemplarity, Rabelais contributes an equally enriching aspect of Marguerite's life: her religious exemplarity. In his address to her, there is a duality at play. Through an image of elevation, he notes that she ascends to the skies: 'frequentant les cieulx'.[63] Her 'manoir divin' demonstrates a god-like presence in her.[64] He echos Philip Melanchthon who, in his correspondence, praised 'le bruit de [sa] grande piété répandu par tout l'univers' and 'charité chrestienne', as well as the numerous women who looked up to her as a spiritual guide, including Marie Dentière.[65] In her *Epistre tres utile* of 1539, Dentière wrote, 'for what God has given you and revealed to us women, no more than men should we hide it [...]'.[66] Marguerite's own prolific religious poetry, including her *Chansons spirituelles*, *Miroir* and *Les Prisons*, formally align her with the image of the ideal early modern woman: pious, and by association, modest, and chaste. By drawing attention to her intellectual, moral, and religious qualities, Marguerite's male collaborators show that her published works do not compromise her illustrious image, for as Du Pré suggests, it is her works which contribute to her esteemed status.

To protect the honour and reputations of women writers, male writers often resorted to an 'entourage sémantique' of female virtues, namely 'honneste', 'gentille', toute spirituell[e]', 'bonne' and 'vertueuse'.[67] These acted as a 'blindage défensif' against public critics who reinforced the connection between print and promiscuity.[68] From dedications to Louise Labé and Pernette du Guillet in 1550s Lyon to epistles complementing the mother-daughter duo, Les Dames des Roches, in Poitiers, all of these women are described in very similar ways. Their networks of collaborative modesty utilize the 'cumulation laudratrice du

[63] Rabelais, *Tiers Livre*, l. 2, p. 1.
[64] Ibid., l. 8, p. 1.
[65] Philip Melanchthon, '107. - Melanchthon A La Reine de Navarre, Salut', in Navarre, *Lettres*, p. 292 (13 June 1534).
[66] Marie Dentière, *Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre and Preface to a Sermon by John Calvin*, ed. and trans. by Mary B. McKinley (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 53.
[67] Ganaza, 'L'Écriture', p. 437.
[68] Ibid., p. 437.

mot vertu et ses dérivés'.[69] Marguerite's story, for all the emphasis on her exceptional nature, is no different; in dedications to her we find numerous virtues which mitigate the potential ruin of her good name. Marot alludes to her moderation:

> Son cueur constant n'est pour heur ou malheur,
> Jamais trop gay, ne trop melancolique[70]

The syntactic parallelism of the two lines of verse reinforce the fact that Marguerite is not representative of one extreme or the other. Her 'cueur constant' keeps her from straying from the path of temperance; she is in control of her emotions and actions. Furthermore, Marot resorts to listing all of the qualities in line with female ideals of the time: '[E]lle a le corps droict, beau, chaste et pudique'.[71] Not for nothing is 'chaste et pudique' the final pair in this list: she is beautiful in appearance and her modesty is intact. Hiding behind a list of admirable virtues she matches up to the identity that conduct writers such as Vives have forged for early modern women.[72] Marot shows her public that she remains loyal to the ideals of modesty and chastity, directly challenging the links made between publishing and promiscuity. To affirm her chastity is to demonstrate that the publishing does not lead women writers to sexual deviancy. On the contrary, Marguerite, he suggests, is an example of a female virtue.

For his part, Sylvius concentrates on her virtues. In fact, he declares that her allegiance to virtue should be crowned, as well as her daughter's own virtues which she inherited from Marguerite. In his address to Jeanne, Sylvius calls her the epitome of the ideal woman:

> Chacun te juge estre la vraye Idee
> De ses vertus & bonté collaudee:

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[69] Ibid., p. 435.
[70] Marot, 'De Madame', ll. 3-4, p. 10.
[71] Ibid., l. 2, p. 10.
[72] Vives, *Livre*, pp. 80-81.

De bonnes mœurs & d'honneur le fontal[73]

Linking mother and daughter, Sylvius confirms that Jeanne is Marguerite's 'pourtrait total';[74] it is a metaphor which we have seen Madeleine and Catherine des Roches use to highlight their own similar virtues. By praising Jeanne, Sylvius also praises Marguerite's exemplary virtues. He also reinforces the pair's (collaborative) companionship in print. Alongside Marot and Du Pré, Sylvius justifies Marguerite's entry into print by reiterating her alliance to gender norms. These men are certainly not the first to highlight her virtues; indeed, the three dedications form part of a group of dedications that highlight her virtuous nature. In 1528 W. F Capiton dedicates his *In Hoseam prophetam V.F. Capitonis Commentarius* to the 'très-illustre, très-religieuse et très-vertueuse Dame Marguerite' who is driven by '[l]'esprit de Christ',[75] while Antoine du Moulin in his 1544 *Recueil des Œuvres de feu Bonaventure des Periers* praises Marguerite's 'haulte Vertu seigneurie'.[76] Equally in his personal correspondence, Erasmus also suggests that men of his time have admired her ('Les admirateurs des vertus de vostre altesse m'on escript') for the same qualities that he admires in her: 'prudence signe d'un philosophe, chasteté, modération, piété'.[77] By widening the network of protection, and bolstering the words of other male writers, Marguerite's protégés uphold discourses of modesty which become associated with her name.

The commonplaces of women as intellectually gifted, virtuous, and supported by men clearly form part of a commonly shared strategy to protect the modesty and reputation of women who appear in print. However, while the men involved in their protection adhere to commonplaces that are used to describe the virtuous *femme de bien*, the publication stories

[73] Sylvius, 'A tresillustre & treschrstienne Princesse', ll. 113-15, p. 7.
[74] Ibid., l. 116, p. 7.
[75] W. F. Capiton, '227- à Marguerite de Navarre', in *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*, ed. by Aimé L. Herminjard, 9 vols (Geneva: H. Georg, 1866-1897), II (1868), p. 119 (22 March 1528).
[76] Antoine du Moulin, 'A tresillustre Princesse Marguerite de France Royne de de Navarre', in Bonaventure des Périers, *Recueil des œuvres de feu Bonaventure Des Périers* (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1544), p. 3.
[77] Erasmus, '31.', p. 184.

of all the women in this study show that male collaborators also find ways to explore more individualized interpretations of the women in print to whom they are connected and with whom they collaborate. The portrayal of Marguerite attests to this most powerfully. There is one unique characterization of her which is not illustrated in dedications about the Des Roches women and Coignard: she is otherworldly. Marguerite's advocates suggest that she is a woman like no other. In fact, she is not quite a woman and not quite a man; Rabelais and Marot even go as far to suggest that she may not even be human. She is a rarity, a remarkable figure whose words should be immortalized in print. Her androgyny is a trait which Du Pré emphasizes; he presents the more masculine side of her personality by portraying her as an honorary man. He illustrates her valour as a political power in the sixteenth century by calling attention to her title of 'Royne du pays navarrois' as well as her 'magesté haulte'.[78] In his commemoration of illustrious women, he dedicates part of the chapter of *Le Jardin* to Marguerite's expedition to Spain and her mother's regency during François I's captivity. By praising Marguerite and Louise he emphasizes the virtuous traits found between mother and daughter, which as Sylvius declares in his own dedication, is passed down to Jeanne. Moreover, he presents an eyewitness account of the time that Marguerite went on horseback to negotiate her brother's release, François I, after he was captured by Charles V at the Battle of Pavia. Resembling the likes of Joan of Arc, Du Pré's Marguerite encapsulates all the qualities associated with an early modern man. She is heroic, courageous and resilient in her ambition to help her brother. He particularly sheds light on her treacherous journey 'par mer, par terre, par perilleux passaige' to visit François.[79] Marguerite transgresses the boundaries placed on her sex by practising an art that was thought to be reserved for men. She is presented as a masculine ruler who comes between

[78] Pré, *Palais*, ll. 5421, 5423, p. 344.
[79] Ibid., l. 5510. p. 346.

two very powerful Renaissance men to negotiate an agreement between both parties. To appear strong in the face of her enemy she put her emotions to one side and travelled far to see her brother: '[L]as, la princesse eust cueur chevaleureux'.[80]

It does not appear farfetched to assume that other men viewed Marguerite as an honorary man. Marot himself states that she possesses the 'cueur d'homme'.[81] Historically, Marguerite's political role allowed her access to male spheres of power of which her contemporary peers were aware. She acted as her brother's advisor, diplomat, and even regent of France during his war campaigns.[82] Within the French court her talents in diplomacy earned her the title of 'prince capétien'.[83] This was a remarkable achievement for the position was usually reserved for men; and yet the money that she gained from this title was often used to establish hospitals and orphanages, a more feminine activity.[84] Her ability to act within both male and female domains is a privilege to which the Des Roches women and Coignard did not have access. Here it is implied, if she can be masculine in political spheres, surely she can also act like a man in the male sphere of being a writer in print?

Marot and Rabelais shed light on a slightly different facet of Marguerite's character. They draw attention to her mystical nature. Beyond operating in both male and female spheres, they show that there is something more mysterious and supernatural at play. As a third dimension of his preface, Rabelais highlights an element of wonder:

> Esprit abstraict, ravy et ecstatic
> Qui frequentant les cieulx, ton origine
> As delaissé ton hoste et domestic,
> Ton corps concords, qui tant se morigine.[85]

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[80] Ibid., l. 5492, p. 346.
[81] Marot, 'De Madame', l. 10, p. 10.
[82] Renja Salminen, 'Introduction', in Marguerite de Navarre, *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, ed. by Renja Salminen (Helsinki: Suomalaine Tiedeakatemia, 1985), pp. 5-82 (p. 13).
[83] Stephenson, *Power*, p. 111.
[84] Akerlund, *French Women Writers*, p. 21.
[85] Rabelais, *Tiers Livre*, ll. 1-4, p. 1.

Marguerite is beyond earthly matters, she lives in a more spiritual, celestial realm. He calls attention to her 'vie peregrine' and suggests that she is from elsewhere, from a place that humans do not inhabit.[86] An allusion to elevation furthers a notion of a metaphorical and spiritual journey in which Marguerite ascends to the skies as a place of refuge. These descriptions leave readers with wonder and confusion: where is Marguerite really from? Is she human after all? Marot takes this further by naming her a 'monstre fort estrange'.[87] This term is representative of the awe that she inspires. She is not a hideous monster, she is an enigmatic creature. He creates an important power dynamic with his choice of address, 'vous' and his self-categorization as her serf. Placing her higher than his own status, he reinforces a notion of distance between the two. This is heightened by his ecstatic exclamation: 'O grant merveille!'[88] Marguerite is a powerful, overwhelming force. She is a marvel who incites amazement from those around her. Her strangeness is solidified by a final testament to her wonder: 'Corps femenin, cueur d'homme et teste d'ange'.[89] Now we see what Marguerite truly is in Marot's eyes; she is a hybrid, a formidable mix between man, woman and angel. It is this combination which amplifies her greatness and rarity. How does this identity, as well as Du Pré's image of the honorary male, serve to protect Marguerite in the public sphere? Whether Marguerite is an honorary male or an intriguing supernatural wonder, she is neither completely male nor female. This inability to properly categorize Marguerite makes it difficult for her critics to also categorize her as a vulnerable and potentially immodest woman in print. She is so exceptional that she cannot be contained by, let alone condemned for, her supposed Reformed views. Her talents and her nature merit the same pedestal as male writers in print, and more. This air of mystery veils the potentially vulgar act of moving into print and equally challenges critics who wish to restrict her for her

[86] Ibid., l. 5, p. 1.
[87] Marot, 'De Madame', l. 8, p. 10.
[88] Ibid., l. 7, p. 10.
[89] Ibid., l. 10, p. 10.

religious tendencies. She is a (wo)man like no other; this alone should grant her a place alongside the great figures of her time.

From these depictions we note the important presence of men in Marguerite's transgression onto the public stage. It offered her a means of retaining her modest and virtuous reputation in public. As we saw in Chapter 1, Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne, is a significant agent in the collaborative modesty which accompanies her mother throughout her writing life, but even she relies on a male editor, Claude Gruget, both to facilitate the Queen's place in print, and to ensure that her name lives on beyond her death. This collocation of finding a place in print with pursuing a quest for writerly immortality is found in many forms of collaborative modesty that we see working in this study. It is most clearly locatable in the ambitions of the Dames des Roches, whose attitude towards male collaborative modesty merits further exploration.

II. The Dames des Roches

i. Agency Through Others

Although the Dames des Roches did not have to deflect attention away from any controversial religious views like Marguerite, they were perhaps more threatening to the social order than the other women in this study. Madeleine, as a widow, was disturbing to male authoritative figures; her position which had offered her an alarming degree of social, economic, and sexual independence.[90] Furthermore, Catherine was young, childless and insistently unmarried, without a father figure to control her. Figures such as Pasquier were particularly concerned by her refusal to accept her womanly duty of becoming a wife. Two women's learned status added fuel to this already immodest fire. Despite this, both women received much admiration from their peers. This was achieved through a male collaborative

[90] Wiesner, *Women*, p. 75.

modesty which allowed the Des Roches to print their works and to amplify their voices while remaining virtuous in the eyes of the public. This network also allowed them to defend themselves from the stigma of participating in the low-class activity of writing and having their works printed, as newcomers to the *noblesse de robe*. While they did not fear persecution for any unorthodox religious views like Marguerite, they did, however, have to justify their cultivation of the pen.

ii. A Useful Means of Protection

A network of male collaborators was an important form of protection which helped the Des Roches to enter into the realm of print without sparking public outrage. In Poitiers they gained the respect of many who attended their salon from 1570 to 1587, a place of literary activity in which the women led intense intellectual discussions and sought constructive criticism of their works from their peers.[91] The communal aspect of the salon solicited male accompaniment, inspiring group discussions, games, and group-conditioned writing.[92] A number of notable men from various professions attended this 'vraye escole d'honneur',[93] ranging from prominent university professors, lawyers, and judges to medical professionals, and poets.[94] The salon network in particular had a major impact on their agency. They inherited a female space of power from previous salon hostesses including Marguerite. The salon was a *petit monde*, often run by women, in which women of the time could express their voices without public criticism.[95] Set in the intimacy of their salon, the Des Roches women were able to transgress the boundaries placed on their gender, attaining liberties of the public sphere, namely writing and discussing with others, in the comfort of their own

[91] Julia K. de Pree, 'Préciosité et Dédoublement: Vers une Nouvelle Lecture des Dames des Roches', *Romance Notes*, 32.3 (1992), 255-62 (p. 256).
[92] Ibid., p. 258.
[93] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Seigneur de Savoye', p. 193.
[94] See Diller, *Dames des Roches*, pp. 55-57.
[95] Claude Dulong, 'From Conversation to Creation', in *A History of Women*, pp. 395-418 (p. 395).

home. We see this collaborative network at play with the production of the *Puce* project, encouraging male and female peers to experiment with their own versions of Catherine's flea story.

Catherine was particularly aware of the benefit of having male collaborators for her own intellectual development. This may be seen in a letter from her *Missives* in which she thanks an anonymous addressee ('je vous remercie de bon cueur'[96]) for his 'docte et exacte correction' of her poetry.[97] I believe that she deliberately includes this letter to not only showcase her skill of writing poetry, but to validate the act itself, which has been permitted by a male collaborator. This network of collaboration which Catherine, and Madeleine, are able to build through letters calls to mind Carol Pal's study of virtual transnational scholarly communities in the seventeenth century. As Pal has shown, a 'Republic of Letters' underlined an 'intellectual commonwealth', in other words, a communal network of female and male intellectuals, across Europe, enhancing their own learning.[98] Letters provided a platform for women to construct new identities within an intellectual space. In a similar fashion, Madeleine and Catherine not only fashion an intimate and intellectual space in the domestic realm, they also take part in a virtual one which allows them the freedom to exchange ideas despite restrictions placed on their mobility.

The admiration of fellow male intellectuals within this network can be clearly seen by several dedications and letters about the Des Roches. Among these are the published letters of Estienne Pasquier to his friend, Pierre Pithou in *Les Lettres* (1586), Lois Le Grand's *Elegie sur le Trespas de Mesdames des Roches de Poictiers mere et fille* (1587) and Scévole de Sainte-Marthe's dedication in *Eloges des hommes illustres, qui depuis un siècle ont fleury en France dans la profession des lettres* (Latin version in 1596, French translation in 1644).

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[96] Catherine des Roches, '4', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 94.
[97] Ibid., p. 93.
[98] Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1.

These highly esteemed men of the time express their admiration for the Des Roches women and construct an identity for them with specific reference to five aspects: they are 1) exceptional women, 2) virtuous and honourable, 3) loyal to their womanly duties, 4) aligned with illustrious men of the time, 5) and finally they are admired for upholding a strong mother-daughter bond. These firmly identify the Des Roches as modest *femmes de bien* and create a veil which conceals and no less validates the women's transgression of modesty.

Merry Wiesner contends that certain humanists, who shared learned women's love of knowledge, sought to portray them as exceptional; this may be said for the Des Roches, whose talents are mentioned by many in their circle.[99] Pasquier is particularly vocal in his wonder at such intellectually astute women. He notes that they are honourable women of his era; Catherine is especially accomplished 'ta[n]t de corps que d'esprit, que je v[y] jamais.'[100] This superlative highlights the wonder that he has experienced in coming across such superb women. He notes that Catherine is one of the most talented women he has ever known, whilst Madeleine, in her own right, is commended for being 'studieuse'.[101] Evidently, Pasquier is impressed by the rigorous routine that they have in reading ancient authors, and emphasizes to Pithou that for their intellectual talents alone they should be hailed as representatives of 'la ville de Poitiers, et de nostre siecle', a place of intellectual flourishing.[102] According to him they are among the great writers of his time. In Sainte-Marthe's case, the mere act of inserting such women into a work that is supposedly about glorifying men of his age suggests the remarkability of the Des Roches. He positions them among the greats to show not only that they are equally talented in the arts, but also to legitimize the women's claim to print. Sainte-Marthe views his time with the Des Roches

[99] Wiesner, *Women*, p. 131.
[100] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Sieur de Savoye', p. 187.
[101] Ibid., p. 186.
[102] Ibid., p. 187.

with nostalgia, reminiscing over the 'le souvenir de cet heureux temps'.[103] Like Pasquier, he emphasizes the talented qualities of mother and daughter and does so in a hyperbolic manner, dividing the women into 'docte Fille' and 'docte Mere'.[104] Their roles of mother and daughter are emphasized; more intriguingly, the repeated use of 'docte' celebrates both their individuality and their likeness. Stressing the delight of men who came in contact with the Des Roches in their 'Academie d'honneur', he sanctifies their home as a place of exquisite intellectual discussion.[105] In comparison, transforming these learned women from monstrous beings to admired women, Le Grand highlights the 'rare cervelle' that the women possess.[106] In comparison with Marot's depiction of Marguerite as a 'monstre fort estrange', Le Grand suggests that Madeleine and Catherine are dynamic creatures, inspiring awe rather than fear.[107] What is intriguing is his merging of the two women: despite being 'dans deux corps' they have '[u]n esprit'.[108] He goes on to proclaim them as a '[m]iracle de [ses] jours, honneur des Poictevins', further stressing their wonder.[109] He hyperbolizes their talents by calling attention to the 'mer de discours tous divers' that is their writing.[110] By using the image of the sea he draws attention to the impressive scale of work that they complete in their humble domestic setting, and yet, sadly 'L'Europe n'[a] conneu leur excellence'.[111] Alongside Sainte-Marthe and Pasquier, Le Grand implies that they are too brilliant to be held back in the domestic sphere. By eternalizing their works in print the Des Roches have done a service to Poitiers, and to the country, demonstrating to future generations that the late sixteenth-century was an era of intellectual flourishing.

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[103] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 361.
[104] Ibid., p. 361.
[105] Ibid., p. 362.
[106] Lois Le Grand, *Elegie sur le Trespas de Mesdames des Roches de Poictiers mere et fille par Lois Le Grand Gentilhomme Tourengeau* (Paris: Estienne Prevosteau, 1587), in Roches et al., *Missives*, l. 22, p. 350.
[107] Marot, 'De Madame', l. 8, p. 10.
[108] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 63, p. 352.
[109] Ibid., l. 79, p. 353.
[110] Ibid., l. 60, p. 352.
[111] Ibid., l. 58, p. 352.

These male poets challenge modesty by arguing that the Des Roches' entry into print does not prevent them from upholding the same modest virtues as other women. Le Grand stresses the qualities the women display in their work: 'Tout esprit vertueux, hommages de l'honneur'.[112] He suggests that Madeleine and Catherine have become more virtuous women by learning like fellow male humanists. However, for Le Grand to align virtue with an essentially humanist education is to incite a civic role or public office for the Des Roches women, which is historically the motive behind receiving a humanistic education. He thus bestows them with a public platform. His reference to virtue also elevates the women's position. In Le Grand's elegy, as well as that of Pasquier and Sainte-Marthe, we find the same female values as are cited over and over again in many conduct manuals of the time: honour, virtue, grace, prudence, and beauty. Feminine grace, especially, is a quality that pardons other faults.[113] Moreover, as with Marguerite, the Des Roches are associated with feminine commonplaces such as 'perles de la France'[114] and 'belles fleurs'.[115] This highlights their precious nature and conformity to notions of the ideal woman as delicate and beautiful. A significant trait, which is also implied, is their preservation of female chastity. Pasquier mentions to Pithou Catherine's stubbornness in remaining unmarried, a sign of her complete loyalty to chastity and learning. This call to chastity encourages us to think of Catherine's poetic allusions to chastity, namely in *Puce*, as a literary reiteration of already existing identities fashioned by male poets. These male writers break down assumptions made between promiscuity and print. They show that rare women in print can and do remain modest; the common anxiety of the time bears no weight in reality.

To create an air of modesty, Pasquier locates the Des Roches within a strictly domestic setting. He reports to Pithou that their salon is set up in the comfort of their own

[112] Ibid., l. 11, p. 350.
[113] Diller, *Dames des Roches*, p. 153.
[114] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 57, p. 352.
[115] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Sieur de Savoye', p. 187.

home. They welcome anyone and treat them with respect and kindness. He refers to the '[h]eureuse […] rencontre et joüissance de deux esprits' and suggests that they are charming and accommodating female hostesses.[116] Conforming to the ideal type of modesty that is promoted by Thomas Dawson, who in his treatise of 1613 argued that a woman should 'eateth not the bread of idlenes', the Des Roches are pictured as active.[117] While they spend time writing, their learning is categorized as a pastime which is pursued only having completed their housework: '[L]a mere et la fille, aprés avoir donné ordre à leur mesnage, se mett[ent] sur les livres'.[118] The mother-daughter pair conforms entirely to traditional ideals of early modern women. Learning is seen as a form of amusement, and while they show great talent for it, it is never prioritized above housework. Sainte-Marthe equally highlights the household, and the intimacy of receiving others into the Des Roches' 'Cabinet'.[119] As charming hostesses, he reminisces over their delightful conversations with intellectuals. According to Sainte-Marthe, they show great politeness in front of men and treat them as guests. This firm attachment to the home implies that the Des Roches are most comfortable in the private sphere; they apparently seek not to transgress this boundary. As a result, they are perceived to be modest, respectful, and virtuous *femmes de bien* who know their place in society.

All three dedications attest to an alignment with illustrious men of the time which suggests that the women are not merely entering the sphere of print alone, but are accompanied by the guidance of men. We have seen this a number of times across this study, starting with Marguerite. But while Marguerite's illustrious male dedicators are also beneficiaries of her patronage, here, the Des Roches women do not benefit from the same

[116] Ibid., p. 187.
[117] Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), p. 196.
[118] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Seigneur de Savoye', p. 193.
[119] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 361.

patronage power. Instead, their relationships are mainly formed with those who attended their salon meetings. This is implied in Pasquier's letter to Pithou in which he states that 'la porte est ouverte à tout honeste homme.'[120] This reveals a physical company that the Des Roches enjoy with men of the time. '[H]onneste' equally suggests that the women also spend time with the right men, those who are virtuous, cultivated and are a good example to follow for the Des Roches themselves. More importantly, the term suggests a certain category of men who are welcomed in the Des Roches' home; these are gentlemen of a certain rank, mercantile or from the lower noble order.[121] Sainte-Marthe alludes to the salon culture in which such men participate. He insists on their admiration of women, particularly of Madeleine who, according to these 'plusieurs excellents hommes',[122] reflects the profession 'des belles lettres'.[123] Sainte-Marthe expresses the men's approval of the women's intellectual pursuits and justifies their salon as a place for mutual learning. Both men and women benefit from being part of an honourable circle of intellectuals. Le Grand also suggests that Madeleine and Catherine have been admired by some of the 'mieux appris de France'.[124] The physical company and support that these men is reinforced by the literary accompaniment of ancient and contemporary male writers. Le Grand mentions some of the great poets and thinkers of his time, Pierre de Ronsard and Jean-Edouard Du Monin, and places them next to the Des Roches. By creating this literary alliance he suggests that the Des Roches should be awarded the same praise as such men, whose works the women themselves are often inspired by.[125] In Pasquier's case, it is working on ancient authors' texts

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[120] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Seigneur de Savoye', p. 193.
[121] The *honnête homme* is a contested figure in the early modern period. We find writers who declare him to be a courtly gentleman of the world who is effortlessly cultivated, and others who mock him for being artificial and a pedant. See Emmanuel Bury, *Littérature et politesse: l'invention de l'honnête homme (1580-1750)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France); C. A. Mayer, 'L'Honnête homme. Molière and Philibert de Vienne's *Philosophe de Court*', *The Modern Language Review*, 46.2 (1951), 196-217.
[122] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 362.
[123] Ibid., p. 362.
[124] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 6, p. 349.
[125] See Footnote 2 in Madeleine des Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', in Roches et al., *Missives*, p. 84; Footnote 7 in Catherine des Roches, 'Epistre a sa Mere', in Roches et al., *Secondes Œuvres*, p. 121. Here, Anne Larsen

which allows Catherine to forge a literary alignment. He repeats what Catherine has mentioned to him before: Catherine is kept in check by her books and paper; in her studies she interacts with notable writers of the past. For this reason, 'elle ne pourra jamais estre seule' for these men 'luy feront perpetuelle compagnie.'[126] If we compare this with the words of Placide, in her *Dialogue de Placide, et Severe*, we may see this as a justification for her intellectual pursuits. Placide, the father of Pasithée, argues against Severe, a man who is fearful of his own daughter's education. Placide states that the pursuit of knowledge can lead to a morally good life. He uses the example of Pasithée to demonstrate that learning has made her an honourable woman.[127] Pasithée pursues a humanist education in the confines of her home, an act which teaches her good morals and upholds the overall honour of her family, since learning in the home ensures that she remains chaste and virtuous.[128] Iris, Severe's daughter, on the other hand, compromises her own honour by being led astray by men outside of the home. Catherine is not like an unruly Iris who demonstrates an 'affection impudique' for male admirers.[129] Instead, like Pasithée, she is a self-disciplined and virtuous woman, kept away from worldly temptations. Catherine is dedicated to something more virtuous and self-fulfilling. In both a physical and metaphorical way, then, great men of the past and present support her and her mother.

The final and perhaps most important weapon in the armoury of their male collaborators is the Des Roches' mother-daughter bond. According to writers of the time, the bond between a mother and a child was sacred and unbreakable, formed at conception.[130] A variety of writers of the sixteenth-century stress the need for the mother to play a

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identifies ideas in the des Roches' works which have been inspired by local contemporary poets such as Joachim du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard.

[126] Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Pithou Seigneur de Savoye', p. 193.

[127] Catherine des Roches, 'Dialogue de Placide, et Severe', in Roches et al., *Secondes Œuvres*, p. 200.

[128] Julia A. Nephew, *The Portrayal of Women's Education from Christine de Pizan to the Dames des Roches (1400-1587)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1998), p. 160.

[129] Roches, 'Dialogue', p. 214.

[130] Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 271.

substantial part in the raising of her children, specifically breastfeeding them, showing them affection and teaching them the correct moral values.[131] Male writers construct this identity around the Des Roches; this aligns them directly with the teachings of contemporary conduct manuals. As we have already seen, the Des Roches' works are staged as a conduct manual; their mutual dedications underline a special mother-daughter bond which also develops into a fictional version in Catherine's *Ravissement*. Sainte-Marthe demonstrates this strong bond in his dedication when he insists on the mother's and daughter's 'affection mutuelle si puissante et si forte'.[132] He describes his pleasure in watching Madeleine 'instruire' her daughter, teaching her the rudiments of her own knowledge, while Catherine remains attentive to her mother's lessons.[133] She is a younger version of her mother and she inherits the same virtues and beauty. Sainte-Marthe not only commends Madeleine in her commitment to her maternal role, but he also admires her for the companionship that she offers Catherine. Together, as opposed to apart, the two seem less threatening to society. They remain in the boundaries of mother-daughter duties and promote a female solidarity which is softened by the image of a strong and loving family unit.

Le Grand highlights a sincere mutual affection between the Des Roches by merging the two women into one perfect body. He repeats the term 'mesme' to signify their closeness and suggests that their 'parfaits accords'[134] may been seen in their works, in which they demonstrate the same: 'science, […] mesme stil, […et] mesme cadence'.[135] This idea is reflected in Madeleine's preface to the *Œuvres*, in which she suggests that she and Catherine share the same soul: 'Le flambeau dans nostre ame allume'.[136] She subsequently asserts that

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[131] A. D. Cousins, 'Humanism, Female Education, and Myth: Erasmus, Vives, and More's "To Candidus"', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 65.2 (2004), 213-30 (p. 214).
[132] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 362.
[133] Ibid., p. 361.
[134] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 64, p. 352.
[135] Ibid., ll. 65-6, p. 352.
[136] Roches, 'Epistre a ma Fille', l. 11, p. 82.

without knowledge the flame in their soul is put out; this makes their joint publications a necessary venture. For one party to not pursue knowledge would be at the detriment of the other. Le Grand ventriloquizes their speech in an emotive discourse between the two. Focusing on their sincere love for one another, he shows that their bond acts as a source of life. Madeleine, he reports, uses the endearing terms of 'Ma fille, mon soucy, ma tendre geniture' to show that Catherine is her only preoccupation.[137] In return, Catherine expresses her desire to learn 'les beaux secrets' that Madeleine possesses.[138] There is also a feminine genealogy that adds to their legitimacy; Le Grand compares Catherine to Greek poetess Sappho, known for her literary talents. In another demonstration of word play of the surname 'Des Roches', he notes that the grand 'Saphon cedoit a ceste Roche' to create a strong alliance with Catherine.[139] We identify the same references used to describe Labé, who was proclaimed to be the 'nouvelle Sappho lyonnaise'.[140] The shared association of Sappho with Labé implies that she participates in an exciting community of contemporary female poets who have continued the poetic line for Sappho.[141] Moreover, Le Grand's lexical field of maternal terms, such as 'enfanté' and '[f]econdes', complement Sylvius's depiction of Marguerite as a flourishing flower; both women are delicate and fertile, both as women and writers.[142] The difference is that Catherine chose not to pursue traditional motherhood, as we know. Regardless, maternal imagery allows Le Grand to relate the creation of poetry to motherhood. This striking metaphor of 'enfanter mainte fleur' reinforces Catherine's ability to experiment with literary motherhood and physical childlessness in her letter to Abel

[137] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 33, p. 351.
[138] Ibid., l. 45, p. 351.
[139] Ibid., l. 50, p. 352.
[140] Bruno Roger-Vasselin, 'Louise Labé et l'écriture au féminin', *L'Information littéraire*, 56.4 (2004), 8-17 (p. 9).
[141] For an understanding of the importance and interpretation of Sappho in the early modern period, see Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550-1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Walter Penrose Jr., 'Sappho's Shifting Fortunes from Antiquity to the Early Renaissance', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 18.4 (2014), 415-36; Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[142] Le Grand, *Elegie*, l. 8, p. 350.

L'Angelier: despite Catherine's chastity, she, like her mother, gives birth to art.[143] This striking metaphor further reinforces the womanly duty of motherhood, which I discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, both Le Grand and Sainte-Marthe touch on the tragedy of the Des Roches' death in 1587. Whilst underlining the tragedy of their passing, they equally use this to solidify an image of mutual adoration. Madeleine and Catherine died of the plague on the same day; Sainte-Marthe poetically affirms that their 'si grande union de cœurs'[144] is unbreakable even in death, and the young Catherine, who had her whole life ahead of her, preferred to join her mother rather than to live alone: '[C]es deux genereuses Dames, qui ne souhaittoient rien plus passionnément que de vivre et de mourir ensemble'.[145] Adding to this, Le Grand reinforces the intimacy of their death, which took place in their own household. In his dedication, which offers retrospective praise to the women, he shows that not even death was strong enough to tear the two apart. These rich maternal-filial associations are key to the Des Roches' identity. They establish a domestic setting which diverts attention from their immodest act of printing.

As we have seen, male writers' dedications are instrumental in engaging with the ideal type of modesty and feminine virtue. They protect the Des Roches in the face of their critics by emphasizing their virtues. If we compare their written declarations with the Des Roches' mother-daughter collaborative network, we discover that the men put in place discourses of which the women make use.

[143] Ibid., l. 24, p. 350.
[144] Sainte-Marthe, *Eloges*, p. 362.
[145] Ibid., p. 363.

III. Gabrielle de Coignard

i. A Retrospective Image of Virtue

Across the sixteenth century we have located a link between printing and promiscuity which required even prominent women to rely on or at the very least benefit from male collaborators to protect them against public scrutiny. However, as we have explored in Coignard's response to modesty, her writing came at a time in which women's writing could be perceived as more acceptable. Christian women who wrote about religious themes in their texts were offered a more favourable entry in print. Nevertheless, in Coignard's posthumous place in print, we find two networks of collaborative modesty who craft a retrospective image of the Christian poet as a virtuous *femme de bien*. They forge her place in the literary canon and encourage her audience to take her seriously as a poet.

Like the other women in this study, Coignard was well connected; this was mainly owing to her late husband, Pierre de Mansencal. As the son of the President of the *Parlement de Toulouse*, and later President himself, he formed part of the elite members of *toulousaine* society.[146] His connections, as I noted in Chapter 3, included fellow *parlementaires* and local editors and printers who often printed their works; one of these was Pierre Jagourt who printed the works of Robert Garnier, Guy du Faur de Pibrac and Jacques Faye, as well as Coignard's *Œuvres chrestiennes* with Bernard Carles.[147] In this milieu of *parlementaires* in print, Jagourt and Carles, and fellow male writers took part in male collaborative modesty and presented Coignard as a virtuous woman. Both Hilarion de Coste and Père Jacob recognized her in their works as one of their *femmes illustres* during their era,[148] and

[146] Baker, '"Sonnets spirituels"', 44-45.
[147] Escudé, *Imprimerie*, p. 136.
[148] Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', p. 15.

Guillaume Colletet, poet and founder member of the *Académie française*, paid tribute to Coignard in his work, *La vie des poètes français*, composed in the seventeenth century.[149]

The paratexts in Coignard's work remain a space of great intrigue for my exploration of male collaborative modesty. We find a range of male figures, from printers to unnamed editors, who highlight Coignard's qualities as an important devout woman and support her daughters' quest to have her poetry circulated. Together they shape a retrospective image of a *femme de bien* whose name is reconstructed as one that is honourable and deserves a place in the devotional literary canon of the time.

ii. The Memory of a Christian Woman

Coignard's *Œuvres chrestiennes* were printed three times following her death: firstly in 1594 in Toulouse by Jagourt and Carles, followed by another publication in 1595 in Tournon for Jacques Faure's bookshop in Avignon, and finally, an edition surfaced in 1613 in Lyon for a certain Abraham Cloquemin.[150] In each case, the various printers, especially Jagourt and Carles, accompany Coignard in print. Under the guidance of male printers she is presented publicly to her audience.

As well as being marked as a strong contributor to the catholic cause by Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal, Coignard's religious poetry is honoured by the actions and words of an anonymous editor. Following on from Jagourt's and Carles's stamp of approval as printers (demonstrated by the appearance of their names on the title page), this unnamed editor firstly attaches her name to her husband's status; she is a *veuve* seeking consolation in her religious poetry for the loss of her life partner. Secondly, he strategically places at the beginning of the work his opening discussion, *Au Lecteur*, which immediately and positively

[149] Unfortunately, it is impossible to review Colletet's work. The manuscript was partially destroyed in a fire in 1871 at the Bibliothèque du Louvre. See Paul Bonnefon, 'Essai de restitution du manuscrit de Guillaume Colletet', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 2.1 (1895), 59-77 (pp. 72-73).
[150] Winn, 'Introduction', pp. 119-21.

shapes the reader's perceptions of Coignard, a devout woman who may serve as a modest model for all woman. In fact, the preface presents Coignard as first an unserious writer, a woman who does not consider herself as an established or professional writer, thus conforming to gender norms, and then as an exemplary woman who spreads an important religious message. This is followed by two sonnets, *Sur les vers de feu Madame de Miremont* and *Dialogue: Philandre et Tolose*, which present four key aspects of her identity: she is an intellectually gifted woman, virtuous, full of honour, and more than any woman in this study, her Christian nature is strongly emphasized. This staunchly Catholic image perfectly captures Coignard's own self-fashioning as a spiritual woman, particularly demonstrated in her allegiance with Pierre de Ronsard in her sonnet, *Sur la mort de Ronsard*. Together these men capture the presence of a *femme de bien* who remains loyal to the Christian cause and whose works merit a place in print.

From the beginning, an unnamed editor, in collaboration with Coignard's daughters, presents the Christian poet as the 'Vefve a feu Monsieur de Mansencal, Sieur de Miremont, President en la Cour de Parlement de Tolose'.[151] She is placed under her late husband's wing. By aligning Coignard with her husband, Jagourt and Carles, and the unnamed editor of the text, demonstrate a seal of approval on the part of her husband for Coignard to appear in print, and they sanction Coignard's own relationship with the city of Toulouse. With Pierre's identity inextricably linked to Toulouse, they reinforce what the daughters do in their dedication for devout women and in Coignard's own *Imitation*, that is to say, to express their mother as an exemplary *Toulousaine*. Moreover, there is an assumption that Jagourt places her work on a par with the works of other Presidents. Her work has value and it

[151] See title page of the 1594 edition of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* in Winn, 'Introduction', p. 119. I follow Gregg in assuming the existence of this unnamed editor who composes two prefatory sonnets to praise Coignard's virtues. See Gregg, 'Volume Editor's Introduction', p. 7. Kenny suggests that the first paratextual sonnet, *Sur les vers de feu de Madame de Mirement*, is written in the voice of her daughters. See Kenny, *Born to Write*, p. 80.

deserves to be read. Jagourt, Carles, and her husband guide her into the public sphere and offer a companionship in print. There is a second advantage to the title of 'Vefve'. Since her poetry is staged as partly a consolatory practice that allows Coignard to grieve her late husband, the title of 'Vefve' solidifies this claim. It shows her to be a weeping widow who is overcome with pain and uses writing as a form of relief. Since she is linked to her husband, she writes in his name and publishes in his name. The title of 'Vefve a feu Monsieur de Mansencal Sieur de Miremont' is therefore more than just a simple form of identifying Coignard, it presents her as a woman grounded in Toulouse and loyal to her husband's name, even beyond her death.

In the second paratext of Coignard's published work, the anonymous editor uses the space to construct a specific understanding of the poet. In one paragraph he details the context within which her writing was composed, how the reader should interpret it, and its use during the time of publication. In other words, he guides the reader and encourages them to view her in a particularly favourable light. He uses his commentary to present Coignard as a true *femme de bien*, adhering to the requirements of her gender and modesty. He does this by beginning with a dismissive tone. Indeed, part of his influence is to draw attention to the fact that the readers should not presume her to be a serious writer:

> [N]'ignorant point que tu ne trouves beaucoup de petites fautes et quelquefois d'assez remarquables en ce livre, que tu pourras taxer et reprendre (ce qui est tousjours tres-aisé).[152]

He establishes his argument by firstly employing the logic of a sceptical reader. Using the familiar address of 'tu', he gives an impression of being on their side. He focuses on the numerous errors that she makes. This is a classic modesty trope which shows Coignard to be a rather careless writer; it is suggested that she does, or rather did not, see her work as professional. The editor implies that it acted as mere pastime for her; this image is reinforced

[152] 'Au Lecteur', in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, p. 36.

by her daughters who mention that her writing was part of her 'loisir'.[153] The reader is encouraged not to judge her work so harshly for this reason. The editor's dismissive tone is a ploy; instead of showing her to be a competent and determined woman in print, he presents her as a rather inexperienced writer who simply chooses writing as a form of private entertainment. It implies that during her time of writing she did not foresee any serious career for herself as a writer in print.

This adherence to gender norms is furthered by the editor's allusions to Coignard's piety. Throughout his commentary he presents her as a simple and honest woman who practices her Catholic faith like a true *femme de bien*. She is an 'honneste et vertueuse Dame' dedicated solely 'à l'honneur et gloire de Dieu'.[154] Conduct manual writers such as Vives argued, 'la femme apprendra par livres, sermons & autres enseignemens, les vertus de son sexe & de sa vocation.'[155] By contrast they must avoid 'livres dampnables', including 'livres d'amours,'[156] which only incite corruption and 'contamin[ent] leurs bouches de chansons impudicques'.[157] In short, an immodest woman occupies herself with topics other than the glory of God. Since Coignard is loyal to the word of God, she is placed in opposition to immodesty. The editor notes that her devotion is the 'seul but et la fin de son entreprise'.[158] She is the ideal Christian example that conduct writers wish to have other women emulate. The editor makes it clear that even beyond her death she remains faithful to society's gender norms. He turns this idea back on to the reader:

> [S]i tu aymes tant soit peu la lecture des bons livres et à repaistre sainctement et consolation incroyable, lisant diligemment ceste œuvres spirituelle, et trouveras que le tout est raporté[.][159]

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[153] Mansencal et al, 'Aux Dames', p. 34.
[154] 'Au Lecteur', p. 36.
[155] Vives, *Livre*, p. 80.
[156] Ibid., pp. 43, 40.
[157] Ibid., p. 43.
[158] 'Au Lecteur', p. 36.
[159] Ibid., p. 36.

Again, approaching Coignard from the reader's perspective, the editor follows the reader's line of thinking by telling them what they should be doing; he suggests that they should be reading a good work for amusement and, more importantly, for their own religious instruction. If they really enjoy reading books which stray away from the morally reprehensible stories full of gossip, then they will surely veer towards Coignard's poetry. Reinforcing Vives's views, he almost challenges the reader's behaviour and good judgement and persuades them in a way that insinuates that if they do not like Coignard's work, then they are indeed engaging with immoral literature. He simultaneously shapes the reader's reading habits and elevates Coignard's status to that of a truly pious woman.

This idealized image transforms her into an exemplar. In the final third of the commentary, the editor now presents her as a role model. He depicts her as the superior religious poet during her time and during the editor's time of writing:

> Une chose te puis je bien encore asseurer que parmi tant de rares et excellens poetes de nostre temps à peine y en a-il aucun qui se puisse vanter d'avoir mieux parlé de Dieu ny escrit plus sainctement ses hauts et sacrez mysteres.[160]

While the editor begins with a dismissive tone, he becomes more overtly admiring of his dedicatee. Coignard is now someone who can capture something beyond the remit of normal poets. She has a special gift that allows her to perfectly depict the mysteries of Christianity. Her spiritual book becomes a catechism: 'Tache donc lisant et relisant journellement ce petit livre d'en faire ton profit.'[161] As a kind of daily prayer, the reader will be enlightened by her words and will be suitably educated in the Christian faith, the editor suggests. The term 'profit' is representative of the editor's persuasive rhetoric; he presents Coignard's work as an opportunity to better themselves. In line with the Counter-Reformation's ambition to produce and disseminate religious works against the rise of Reformist thinking, her fervently

[160] Ibid., p. 36.
[161] Ibid., p. 36.

Catholic poetry fits in neatly with the print market in Toulouse. She captures a spirit that seems to be inaccessible to the average person and she forges a special relationship with God. She is the medium through which others can become better Catholics:

> [À] fin que les vains et les lascifs discours de tant d'autres autheurs ont corrumpu en toy de bonnes mœurs, tu le puisse corriger par le remede salutaire de ceste poesie spirituelle. A Dieu.[162]

Coignard is capable of teaching good mores; she can put people on the right path that leads directly to God. More than this, she can ensure their salvation ('par le remede salutaire'). The moral image makes Coignard seem like an incontestable beacon of virtue that guides others towards virtue.

Following his address to the reader of the *Œuvres chrestiennes*, the editor introduces his two sonnets, both of which praise Coignard. The first sonnet lauds her as a '[p]arangon de [s]on sexe' whose death many people lament.[163] The second sonnet, *Dialogue*, represents a discussion between Philandre and an allegorized Toulouse.[164] Here the city is staged as a place that births great talents that are known all over the world. With reference to Coignard and, more specifically, to her death, the editor puts this down to Heaven's envy of Toulouse's great children. It is another way to not only laud Coignard and position her next to the great poets and writers of Toulouse, but also to tie her with Toulouse as a product of her great local surroundings.

The editor's deep admiration for Coignard is firstly demonstrated by emphasizing her intellect. In the *Dialogue*, he uses the voice of Philandre to talk of '[c]es escripts d'une femme, esprit prodigieux'.[165] He perhaps chooses not to name her in order to retain an element of modesty, however, following *Sur les vers*, it is clear that he means Coignard. To

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[162] Ibid., p. 36.
[163] 'Sur les vers de feu Madame de Miremont', in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 3, p. 38.
[164] Philandre was the son of Acacallis and Apollo, and twin brother of Phylacide. See Footnote 8 in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, p. 161.
[165] 'Dialogue: Philandre et Tolose', in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, l. 3, p. 38.

him, she is an extraordinary woman; 'prodigieux' denotes that she is more than just a wonder, she is rare, exceptional to the average poet or writer in Toulouse. This is only reinforced in the following line: 'Outre tant de grands dons qui decorent nostre aage!'[166] She is a 'beau monstre', but not because she is androgynous, as we find Marot's description of Marguerite.[167] The term 'monstre' is a commonplace, used to depict someone who is awe-inspiring and an intellectual. According to the editor, the creation of her poetry is thanks to the 'Genereuse cité' of Toulouse.[168] Toulouse is a place that allows wonderful poets to flourish and she is a product of this wonderful place. Since she is part of a fantastic breeding ground for poetry, it is only right that she is able to spread her poetry far and wide. Similarly, *Sur les vers* picks up on the brilliance of Coignard's poetry. The editor's sonnet is a dedication to her poetry in particular; it is a worthy topic to laud, the editor suggests. He reveals a deep respect for her poetic talents:

> Nous lisons tes beaux vers que les Anges au cieux
> Chantent avecque toy d'un air melodieux,
> Louans de Dieu sans fin les œuvres et la gloire.[169]

Throughout the poem, the editor applauds Coignard's virtues and laments the fact that she is no longer with him on earth. It is only at the end when he notes that he and others ('Nous') will remember Coignard for being a talented poet. By constructing an image of angels in heaven, he presents her poetry as divine. The angels glorify her work for its beauty and elegance, terms which reinforce Coignard's femininity. To justify her work further the editor mentions in the last line that her poems are written in the name of God. She continually glorifies God and for this reason she should be read with admiration. While her work is presented as partly a consolation for Coignard's grief at the loss of her husband, the editor also reads her poetry as the way to grieve for her. Her verses are beautiful and melodious,

[166] Ibid., l. 4, p. 38.
[167] Ibid., l. 2, p. 38.
[168] Ibid., l. 1, p. 38.
[169] 'Sur les vers', ll. 12-14, p. 38.

and they are also a means of coping with a loved one's passing. Readers may look to her poetry which captures her spirit and memory. It is a way for her memory to live on.

Furthermore, the editor points to all of the virtues that she encompasses as a paragon of her sex. As we find in the dedications written in favour of Marguerite and the Dames des Roches, there are allusions to grace and beauty:

> Honneur de ma Patrie, esprit de tant de graces,
> Et de tant de beautez sainctement revestu[170]

These lines of verse stress her femininity. The term 'sainctement' runs throughout the sonnet; in every way she is blessed by God. Later on, the metaphor of an 'estoille de vertu' explicitly brings out the fact that she is virtuous.[171] She shines brightly in the sky and this is because she is the perfect example of a woman. As a '[f]leur de devotion', she is presented in a similar fashion to the other women in the study who are depicted as delicate and fecund.[172] While these virtues are more explicitly named in the first sonnet, the editor also alludes to her virtuous nature in the *Dialogue*. She is a beautiful and mysterious spectacle in his eyes; she forms part of the group of '[b]eaux thresors de la terre et beaux presens des cieux', one of Toulouse's 'enfans si pretieux'.[173] Together, these descriptions forge a highly positive retrospective image of a *Toulousaine* Christian widow; the editor suggests that during her time of living and beyond her death, she is remembered as a beacon of virtue. If we pair this with the editor's reference to the *Œuvres chrestiennes* as a catechism, perhaps too her work, as a spiritual exercise, will guide others in Toulouse (and beyond) towards a virtuous and spiritual life.

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[170] Ibid., ll. 1-2, p. 36.
[171] Ibid., l. 3, p. 38.
[172] Ibid., l. 4., p. 38.
[173] 'Dialogue', ll. 6-7, p. 38. The editor calls attention to Coignard as one of the precious children in Toulouse, as well as figures including Gratien du Pont, Guy Du Faur de Pibrac, Jean Bodin, Jean de Boyssoné, Etienne Dolet and Guillaume Salluste du Bartas. See Footnote 10 in Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets*, p. 162.

These local-political references encourage us to think of Pasquier's letter about the Dames des Roches who, according to him, are honourable representatives of their home city, Poitiers. Similarly, in the *Dialogue*, the allegory Toulouse notes the renown that it receives for its talented children:

> Je te diray que c'est: c'est le ciel envieux,
> Qui cognoit bien, voyant fleurir si glorieux
> Le don que j'ay receu de luy mesme en partage,
>
> De meint enfantement si celebre en touts lieux,
> Que s'il m'avoit encor donné cest advantage,
> Au lieu d'esprits divins j'enfanterois des Dieux.[174]

Coignard contributes to the fame of Toulouse, and in turn the heavens want her for their own; for this reason she departed the world too soon. Since the editor refers to treasures of Toulouse as being notable poets and writers, Coignard's own honour, which is also that of her 'Patrie', is closely connected to her talents as a poet. The terms 'esprits divins' and 'Dieux' call for her name to be immortalized, a muse who sits with the great poets who have also passed away.

Equally, the editor's simple 'Parangon de ton sexe' in *Sur les vers* is more than just a compliment to her memory.[175] As we know from his description of her virtues, she is perceived to be the ideal *femme de bien*. In his discussion of honour, another layer hints at the example that she sets for other women of her time and beyond her death. This notion of exemplarity is also employed by Hilarion de Coste and Père Jacob by virtue of grouping her with other *femmes illustres* in their works. Honour is equally granted to Coignard because of her status as a devout woman who adheres to the norms that her society dictates. Thus, alongside her beautiful, melodious poetry, the subject matter of her work symbolizes her adherence to her womanly duties as a Christian woman. For these reasons, the editor claims,

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[174] 'Dialogue', ll. 9-14, p. 38.
[175] 'Sur les vers', l. 3, p. 38.

her memory should be honoured by her contemporaries and future generations. This argument is illustrated in *Sur les vers*:

> Sçais-tu que nous faisons pour le seul reconfort
> De nos cœurs affligez despuis ta triste mort?
> Flattez de la douceur de ta vive memoire,
>
> Quel fut nostre heritage? Et que nous laissas-tu,
> Que le dueil et les pleurs dont nous baignons nos faces?[176]

Coignard has ascended to a higher, superior place. In his address to Coignard's spirit, the editor creates a community of admirers. His employment of the subject pronoun 'nous' only contributes to the fact that he is not alone in his viewpoint. Her positive influence is wide-ranging; numerous people are overcome with deep grief over her passing. The reference to tears here is a powerful one; it is deeply emotive and reveals the extent to which people suffer and seek consolation. It also reveals a form of cleansing; the tears are holy, they act as a way of commemorating Coignard's name. Like holy water, the tears wash away the pain and leave her sweet, vivid spirit which is present in her poetry. Like a religious service, the editor and other followers gather together to sing her praises as though her verses are hymns for God. This powerful vision of worship shows that her appearance in the public eye only strengthens the splendour of her 'Patrie'.

In short, this splendour is only achieved because of the strong religious aspect of her work. Indeed, Coignard's piety is what stands out more than any other woman in this study; it is a part of her identity which is emphasized by her editor and her daughters. Religious writing often offered women agency; it gave them the opportunity to enter the world of print while also firmly aligning them with contemporary gender norms. Certainly Coignard achieved this through her spiritual sonnets and her male collaborators used this to justify her

[176] Ibid., ll. 9-14, p. 38.

posthumous esteem. In *Sur les vers*, the editor implies that her devout identity is what elevates her:

> Lors que tu t'envolas dans les celestes places,
> Triomphant du peché soubs tes pieds abbatu,
> Quel fut nostre heritage? Et que nous laissas-tu,
> Que le dueil et les pleurs dont nous baignons nos faces?[177]

Like a free spirit, she veers away from worldly sins and flies towards a virtuous path which leads to God. This image evokes Rabelais's own depiction of Marguerite in his *Tiers livre*; she ascends to the skies leaving her followers behind in the earthly world. However, what lifts Coignard up is not because she is an awe-inspiring figure, who is not quite a man nor a woman, as Marot more suggests of Marguerite. The editor reveals the reason in the final line of the sonnet: 'Louans de Dieu sans fin les œuvres et la gloire.'[178] She is welcomed into the gates of heaven because she is a faithful servant of God. Like a true Catholic she dedicates her life and her writings to the glory of God. Her work becomes a confessional diary in which she contemplates God's love and relationship with him. This understanding of her work is particularly important during the context within which the work was published. Religious conflict in Toulouse continued well after Coignard's death. Particularly during a time in which the Counter-Reformation gained momentum, the publication date of her spiritual poetry is well timed. In fact, the editor alludes to this in *Dialogue*: 'Mais dy moy, je te pry, (car chacun t'outrage)'.[179] Philandre's comment is most likely an allusion to conflict in Toulouse. As a Catholic bastion Toulouse was positioned in between provinces which had been dominated by Huguenots.[180] The strong verb choice of 'outrage[r]' refers to acts of violence and devastation which upset peace in Toulouse, as we have seen, and Coignard herself alludes to this in her poetry. If we read both of the editor's sonnets together,

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[177] Ibid., ll. 5-8, p. 38.
[178] Ibid., l. 14, p. 38.
[179] 'Dialogue', l. 5, p. 38.
[180] For more information about religious conflict in Toulouse, see Philippe Wolff, *Histoire de Toulouse* (Toulouse: Privat, 1967), pp. 271-91.

Coignard's piety appears as an intervention into an ongoing conflict. For her Catholic readership, she is a perfect representative of the Counter-Reformation, and this creates a rich justification for her voice to be made public. Indeed, her editor, along with her daughters, presents her publication to be fundamental to the religious cause. Looking back at the poet who has now passed, the readers are encouraged to view her retrospectively as a devotional figure who represents what they perceive as the true faith.

Evidently, this devout aspect of Coignard identity is fundamental to the collaborative modesty with which her male protectors retrospectively engage as her works come into print. This is not to say that Coignard did not take an active part in her own self-fashioning during her time of writing. Indeed, she very clearly aligned herself with Catholic figures in her own writing. We find this in her dedication to the memory of Ronsard, entitled *Sur la mort de Ronsard*. She anticipates the place of her editor, commemorating a poet who has now passed, but whose memory lives on. She uses Petrarchan conventions, some inspired by Ronsard's own poems, and adapts the context for her own interests, making of Ronsard more than simply a model: he becomes a means of her own validation. Prominent *Toulousain* Jacques Colomiès printed Ronsard's poetry as a weapon against the Reformed religion, and now Coignard uses his name to shape her readers' retrospective image of her.[181] Placed at the end of her spiritual sonnets, this dedication to the Prince of (Catholic) poets confirms that she is fundamentally a Christian poet who writes in the name of God. In her commemoration of God's 'Apollon',[182] she not only sanctions Ronsard's status as a Christian poet, she also directs her address to the Muses, commenting that while the universe suffers from his death, he is in a divine place:

> Dieu l'a voulu tirer du cloistre de ce corps,
> Sa belle ame a trouvé les celestes accords,
> Ayant vollé plus haut que le mont de Parnasse.[183]

[181] Escudé, *Imprimerie*, p. 116.
[182] Coignard, 'Sur la mort', l. 5, p. 158.
[183] Ibid., ll. 9-11, p. 158.

Deploying similar imagery to that which the editor will use to describe her, Coignard depicts an ascendance. Ronsard's elevation sees him soar above and beyond Mount Parnassus, the familiar early modern reference to the home of poetry, music and learning, where the Muses reside. In this evocative poetic illustration, Ronsard is shown to surpass classical poetry; he becomes 'immortel', by becoming an inspiration and a weapon for the Catholic cause during ongoing religious conflict.[184] Heralding her own editor's reference to poetic inheritance – 'Quel fut nostre heritage?'[185] – she affiliates herself with Ronsard's admirers and notes that '[n]ous heritons ses labeurs precieux'.[186] She reaps the benefits of his devotional poetry, much like her own admirers who seek consolation in her *Œuvres chrestiennes*.

Coignard's alliance with Ronsard complements the image that her male collaborators conjure up. Retrospectively, the editor and printers of the *Œuvres chrestiennes* strengthen the message that her own daughters detail in their dedication: Coignard writes beautiful verses which are useful for fellow Christians to read.

Conclusion

As we have discovered in this chapter, despite the great impact that daughters, Jeanne d'Albret, Catherine des Roches, and Jeanne and Catherine de Mansencal, had in the composition, publication, and reception of their mothers' texts, there was still a necessary dependence on men to ensure their mothers' place in the public sphere of print. The composition and publication of Marguerite's works represent a collaborative fashioning of modesty, uncovered by a network of printers, editors, poets, and writers. The patronal networks formed with these men reveals an intervention on the part of those below the station of a woman of high rank. The men in her life pacify her critics and facilitate her

[184] Ibid., l. 12, p. 158.
[185] 'Sur les vers', l. 7, p. 38.
[186] Coignard, 'Sur la mort', l. 13, p. 158.

transgression into the printing sphere despite her controversial religious views. In comparison, the Dames des Roches demonstrate the level of authority that male collaborative modesty can offer them: the power to pursue education and print their works while maintaining a good reputation. Their dedicators entrench them within the framework of female virtue and employ maternal-filial discourses which the women themselves emulate in their own writing. Finally, an unnamed editor and the printers of Coignard's spiritual sonnets help to create a retrospective image of the Christian poet as an exemplary *femme de bien*. Their strategic editorial choices and poetic paratexts bolster her daughters' own dedication which seeks to highlight their mother's poetic talents and deep piety. Together, these collaborators set the tone for how readers, contemporary and future, should perceive their late mother.

As all three examples of male collaborative modesty have shown, male networks have the power to restrict women in print while simultaneously offering them agency. The introduction of men in women's publication stories is a necessary reality at a time in which men govern women's behaviour and society at large. For mothers and daughters to make use of these male networks is not necessarily a sign of submission, but rather the acceptance of this harsh reality, and a willingness to make use of whatever influence to which they might have access. Collaborative modesty is symbolic of the intricate histories that envelop these early modern women writers' texts. It offers us an opportunity to rethink women's writing and agency in this period and the ways in which different participants in literary production, male and female, may challenge our understandings of authorship.

Conclusion

Modesty, and its related connotations, have clear prominence in the lives of early modern women, shaping their reputations and the ways in which they, and society, view them and their bodies. I have analyzed selected works by Marguerite de Navarre, the Dames des Roches and Gabrielle de Coignard to explore how certain women writers transgress the boundaries of discourses in circulation to establish their own conceptualizations of modesty and appropriate the primarily male-defined concept for their own interests.

Throughout this study, we find four women writers who seek agency through their different literary discussions of modesty. Working with the ideal type of modesty they comment on the related themes of chastity, female desire, eroticism, knowledge, the body and silence; their views do not map neatly on to each other or their society's enforcement of modesty. Location, both literal and thematic, plays a significant role in fashioning their responses. Marguerite de Navarre's courtly life in Nérac is found in the spaces of intellectual debate and experimentation in the *Comédie*; her characters mimic the discussions in which she and other courtly figures were engaged. Towards the latter half of the century, Madeleine des Roches's experience of modesty captures very localized accounts of religious conflict in her home city of Poitiers. Her daughter, Catherine, forges a connection between knowledge and the female body which is influenced by the *poitevin* salon which she and her mother hosted. Finally, the catholic bastion of Toulouse influences Gabrielle de Coignard's allegiance with her faith during religious turmoil. Her *cabinet toulousain* is transformed into a fictional space in which she explores a deep, and at times erotic, love for God, from which future devotional women can benefit.

These highly localized experiences highlight the degree to which location contributes to the *topoi* and tropes of modesty with which other early modern women writers

interact, across the sixteenth century and beyond. My study is but a small, fragmentary part of a wider movement to redefine our understandings of modesty in relation to early modern women's writing. I argue that we may identify various other responses to modesty which are shaped profoundly by a woman's local and intimate surroundings. As others have shown, the environment in which du Guillet and Labé live and write raises new questions regarding Lyon and the ideas that emerge from the *École lyonnaise*, a collaborative network of male and female poets. By the same token, in the next century, Gabrielle de Suchon and her concept of the *célibat volontaire* create space for an evaluation of the impact of Dijon on her ideas about chastity and civic duty.

Women's thinking about modesty becomes more complex still in the face of collaborative modesty. As I have shown, the latter is a strategic tool which provides, in the first instance, defensive measures; it fosters the appearance of conforming to the ideal type of modesty without actually, or fully, doing so. It justifies the impropriety of women writers' choices to have their works printed. But collaborative modesty serves as more than a defence; these networks also facilitate a reshaping and reconceptualization of women's reception, in the past and present. The women of this study demonstrate the level of authority that collaborative modesty can offer them: the power to have their voices made public while maintaining a good reputation. This is not to say that this newfound agency is without its difficulties and complexities. In Marguerite's story, her relationship with her daughter is often strained and complex. Other women in this study, most obviously Coignard, are more neutral in these networks; she only became a woman in print through the determination and initiative of her daughters. Indeed, the power of daughters is fundamental to the story of collaborative modesty in this study. To varying degrees, we find a mother-daughter network which exercises a vital role in influencing the composition, publication, and reception of these women writers' texts. Again, Marguerite's interaction with this network seems to have

been more tense than the loving bond that can be found with the Des Roches women and Coignard and her two daughters. But what remains constant is the fact that writerly daughters demonstrate the power that younger women have in accompanying and supporting their mothers in the printing sphere, with the vital intervention and guidance of male collaborators.

As my discussion of collaborative modesty has demonstrated, the intervention of a range of male and female peers for early modern women writers makes way for a new and more complicated understanding of literary collaboration which takes place across different locations and cannot be reduced simply to the participation of 'fellow' poets and writers. As we find in the stories of all the women involved in this study, daughters, printers, and editors, for example, play an important role in literary creation, publication and textual reception. This intriguing aspect of print and publication leaves open the opportunity to explore other forms of collaborative modesty: do other early modern women writers in France, and in other countries, witness the intervention of their daughters who help to publish their works? If there are no daughters to be found, or any children for that matter, who, if anyone, facilitates the entry of these women writers in print? Are there other forms of collaborative modesty –within and beyond what Kenny calls the 'family function' – that can be identified? Du Guillet's posthumous support from her husband, for instance, suggests a potential expansion of family members in the production of female authorship and print. Labé, a supposedly childless woman, seems to rely more on male friendships. These examples suggest that there is room to explore the importance of collaborative modesty and its various forms in early modern society; literary collaboration is a complex nexus that manifests itself in a number of ways across time and space and offers a new way of thinking about early modern women authors.

If we return to my initial querying of the pertinence of 'submissive/subversive' categories, historically used to define early modern women writers, this raises an important question: following the involvement of male and female collaborators in the publication of their works are the women writers of this study complicit in their own subjection, or alternatively are they rebelling against society in some way? Neither offers a full account of the complexities of each different case. In Coignard's story, it is not even proven that she sought to have her works printed. Marguerite and the Dames des Roches are, however, aware of the reality of the obstacles that they and other women writers in print face in sixteenth-century French society. Collaborative modesty offers Marguerite a place in the world of print, relatively protected from charges of religious and social scandal. Likewise, these types of networks enable the Dames des Roches to award themselves a voice in print; they entrench themselves within the framework of maternal-filial duty and shrewdly emulate already-existing discourses of male collaborators. Using the protection of male counterparts, whether viewed favourably or not by women writers, is not an example of capitulation or subversion; none of these women either passively submit to or actively destroy patriarchal discourses. Indeed, collaborative modesty is a powerful illustration of female agency acting within the confines of society. Marguerite and the Dames des Roches, in particular, benefit from their networks within the constraints of their respective environments and status. For Coignard, this agency in print is awarded to her retrospectively through her daughters. The nuanced forms and expressions of collaborative modesty, alongside women writers' literary responses to modesty in this study, highlight the complex positions that women writers, and their daughters, can take up to forge their own spaces of influence.

With this follows an interesting discovery about gender. As we have seen in the works of Marguerite, the Dames des Roches and Coignard, the male policing of female modesty in sixteenth-century society may work in theory, but not necessarily in practice.

For women writers, there is scope to produce through mimicry, parody, and transgressive performance, their own female-specific accounts of modesty. Can we relate this to other women of the time? Using modesty as a heuristic device, and collaborative modesty to explore the works of other women writers, we most definitely can. Both can unearth a new set of moves that women make to comprehend their circumscribed positions. If we use these as lenses to assess other women writers, we submit our preconceived assumptions of them to scrutiny and reconfigure our understandings of gender in early modern society in more flexible and intricate ways. For this reason, we should further explore the implications of modesty and collaborative modesty across the sixteenth century and beyond, allowing more room for early modern women to exhibit a wider range of creative responses to the cultural, political and religious conditions in which they lived and worked.

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